

EVERY WEEK

JUNE 9, 1923

DETECTIVE

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ON HIS THIRTIETH BIRTHDAY

By Oscar Schisgall

A Psychoanalytical Crime





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E V E R Y W E E K

Vol. LVIII

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DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE EVERY WEEK

Vol. LVIII

June 9, 1923

No. 3

On His Thirtieth Birthday by Oscar Schisgall

Author of "A Visitor from Paris," "Tied in the Tenth," etc.

CHAPTER I

LILLIAN COMES TO CHURCH.

THROUGH the dark emptiness of the church reverberated the thunder of the organ. The close air shook with the sound, loud and deep and passionate. Tremendous chords roared from the pipes and suddenly ceased, receding before the insistent rhythm of a melancholy melody, as soft as it was tender. And presently a note of gayety tinkled in the solemn music; it persisted, gained in strength, until the organ was sending forth a happy, lilting tune, as clear as sleigh bells and as merry.

One circle of light lay in the blackness of the deserted building; it fell upon the keyboard of the organ and upon

two withered, nervous hands, whose long fingers danced upon the keys. And just above these fingers was bent a thin face—a face that was aged, lined with the sufferings of years. In the dim luminosity it appeared white, almost the same color as the straggling hair above it. Occasionally, as an exceptionally touching passage of the music floated from the organ, the eyes of that ashen face closed, the lips smiled. But immediately a stamp of severity returned to the countenance, for another passage was reached, one of crashing, throbbing seriousness. And the organist's bony fingers pressed rigidly down.

This was Amos. At times newcomers to the church called him Mr. Hobart. But a few weeks in the society of the

other parishioners taught them that such an appellation was improper. One must say Amos if one desired to insure one's prestige. Only children were required to employ the respectful prefix of mister; others were superior.

Amos came to the church every night. Alone he would sit in the darkness and play the organ. No one ever thought of the instrument as anything but Amos' organ; the fact that the church had purchased it did not matter. The organ belonged to Amos Hobart. Fingers other than his seldom touched it. He enjoyed playing for himself. He liked the sense of awesome space, unlimited and yawning, which the empty building created. He liked the depressing silence, the stuffy atmosphere. For here he could be the true artist; there were no critics to please, no auditors to entertain. He could follow the impulse of his soul. And so each night he played to himself, though a few listeners usually gathered outside the church.

This evening he had chosen to gratify his aestheticism with a Beethoven sonata; and when his hands fell from the keys after the last, lingering chord, he closed his eyes and permitted his chin to sink upon his chest. He was happy. Within him something had calmed, cleansed. He was prepared to go home in a spirit of contentment. But, even as he sighed and began to rise, a strange thing happened.

He heard his name whispered in the darkness.

Amos sank back upon the stool, his features wrinkling, as he tried to peer toward the altar.

"Who—who is there?" he asked, and his usually mild tones were tremulous. Somehow he had been startled into a ridiculous moment of fear. He listened intently for a reply.

"Is that you, Amos dear?"

The old man uttered a glad cry. Joyfully he rose and moved forward out

of the circle of light, his arms extended in welcome.

"Lillian!" he exclaimed. "Of all people!"

The hazy figure in white approaching him resolved itself into the graceful form of a girl. She advanced to him and grasped both his hands.

"What on earth made you come here at this time?" Amos demanded, striving to lend a semblance of reproach to his delighted tones.

"I wish to talk with you, Amos."

"But here, my child? At this hour?"

"Yes. I must."

For the first time he noticed the trembling of her voice, the catch which hinted of suppressed sobs. He frowned in concern. His arm encircled her shoulders, as he drew her to a pew. When they sat, she clasped her hands in her lap and lowered her head. A vague glow from the organ light played upon her profile; she was biting her lip. Her smooth, delicate cheeks were colorless. She seemed deeply moved.

"Lillian!" gasped the man. "What is the trouble? What——"

Her hand, falling upon his, silenced him. He waited, while she found strength in a deep breath.

"I've come to ask your help, Amos," she whispered. "You and mother are the only ones who understand; and mother is too shocked to do anything."

"To do anything? About what?"

"About Randolph——" Her voice melted to an indistinct mumble; again her head drooped, and a slight sob escaped the girl.

In an access of feminine sympathy, Amos drew her close to himself, his hand patting her shoulder.

"Now, now," he murmured soothingly, "don't you worry about Randolph Burford! He'll be all right soon enough. It was a bad accident, of course, but it will heal."

Lillian turned to him, her brows drawn in a straight, painful line. The

pressure of her hand on the old man's increased.

"It *has* healed!" she cried. "The wound wasn't much—just a gash at the back of his head. But—but—there's something else!"

"Something else?"

"Yes, something inside his head."

Amos straightened. He scowled.

"What do you mean, Lillian? It hasn't left him unbalanced?"

"It has left him insane—yes, insane! I went to see him to-night, and—oh, it's terrible! Doctor Emery says he is trying to cure him, but, Amos, I never heard of anything like it!"

She covered her round cheeks with her hands and wept bitterly. Amos made no effort to still the girl; he waited. And when she was again calm, though sobbing, he spoke kindly.

"Where is Randolph now, Lillian?"

"At Doctor Emery's. He—he's going to live there until he's cured—or until the doctor decides to send him to an asylum."

"Is he—er—violent? Does he recognize you?"

Lillian's handkerchief pecked at her nose.

"He isn't violent," she replied brokenly, "and he recognizes everybody. Only—only he has a queer idea—a strange idea."

"About what?"

"About himself and St. Michael."

In amazement Amos leaned back. The dim light revealed his lined face gaping questioningly.

"About himself and St. Michael!" he repeated in awe. "What sort of an idea is that?"

"Oh, Amos, it's the weirdest thing you ever heard! He says that he has a contract with St. Michael."

"A contract with St. Michael!" Amos gulped. He glanced uneasily about the blackness. There was something blasphemous in discussing such a problem, but the old man's curiosity prompted

him to continue. "Lillian, tell me what it is. What has happened to Ranny?"

The girl was clutching his arm. As she faced him, the glow of the little electric bulb fell full upon her delicate face, and Amos could watch the rapidly changing expressions, as she talked.

"He is insane," she said quickly. "When he fell the shock must have disarranged something in his brain. I don't know how those things happen. Doctor Emery explained it, but I didn't understand. Any way, Ranny is demented. But only in one strange thing. You won't—you won't be able to believe it——"

"Yes, I'll believe anything, Lillian! Tell me——"

"It's this contract idea. He prattles to everybody about it. He says that while he was sick, in that unconscious state, he saw St. Michael and made an agreement with him."

"Yes, yes, I know. But what sort of an agreement?"

"Ranny—Ranny is to live until he is thirty—not a day longer. At thirty, on his thirtieth birthday, to be exact, which comes in two months, he is to die. St. Michael will take him. In return for surrendering his life at so early an age, Ranny is granted a great privilege. He is not to be held accountable for anything he does on earth. He may commit any crime, do anything, kill, steal, slaughter, torture—and he is not to be punished after death. The only condition is that he die at thirty. Oh, Amos, Amos, did you ever hear of anything so crazy, so insane? The boy's mind is twisted hideously! He'll do *anything* now!"

"Lord!" whispered the organist, shuddering.

"Do you understand, Amos? He is under no restriction, under fear of nothing! He believes he has but two months to live, and that he can commit any crime, do anything, in those two months. There is no suppression, no

future court for him to face. And he swore he would take advantage of his side of the bargain! He—he's begun already—with me."

Amos leaped to his feet. He was trembling.

"What has he done to you, Lillian?" he demanded, his mellow tones becoming harsh, husky.

"Oh, don't be so horribly frightened," she answered, pulling him back to the seat. "He has merely told me to forget about our engagement—our marriage."

"He was sane enough to remember that, was he?"

"Oh, yes. He remembers everything, knows every one. The only change in him is this crazy idea. He told me he didn't intend to marry me now—that he had other things to do. And he ordered me out of the doctor's house."

"Lord!" Amos murmured again. His hands rubbed over his knees, and he stared through the darkness of the church. For a long time they were silent, each pondering over the mania that had seized the crazed Randolph Burford—Ranny, whom they had known since his boyhood.

The thoughts of old Amos were confused. It was difficult to vision Randolph as anything but a jubilant, rather handsome, young fellow, frankly in love with Lillian Chester. To imagine him as a lunatic whose delusion sanctioned any horror which might suggest itself to his warped brain—Amos groaned. He glanced at the girl from the corners of his eyes, almost fearfully, and asked:

"What—what's going to be done?"

Lillian seemed quite calm now.

"I don't know, Amos. That's why I came to you."

"Well—have you talked to mother?"

Dully she nodded.

"Yes; the news upset her terribly. She doesn't know what to do. You know Ranny's been sort of a son to her."

"Yes," mumbled Amos, "I know." He

gazed off through the darkness. "Do you think we'll have to send him to an asylum?"

"An asylum!" At the word Lillian recoiled; but at once her calmness returned. "An asylum! I—I suppose so. It's the only thing to do. Ranny is dangerous, with his ideas."

"What does Doctor Emery advise?"

"Oh, he doesn't seem to be certain of what's best. I asked him, and he told me that he was afraid of what might happen if Ranny went to an institution. Perhaps the atmosphere would make him worse. The doctor thinks that he may be able to cure him, provided Ranny remains under his care."

"With the doctor?"

"Yes; just a few weeks, as an experiment."

"But, dear girl!" exclaimed Amos. "We can't permit that! If Randolph is dangerous, if he may commit some crime, we must send him away for safety! How can we permit——"

"Doctor Emery doesn't think so. He wants Ranny under his constant care. It's the only chance of curing him."

Amos Hobart was wailing in protest.

"Suppose he does something! Robs—kills—anything! How can we risk it? We must send him to an asylum, Lillian!"

Slowly she shook her head.

"No, Amos, we must trust to Doctor Emery's wisdom. Ranny will have no opportunity to do anything wrong. He will be under constant care. Don't worry about that."

Baffled, old Amos looked away. His bony fingers twined through his hair. Several times he swallowed.

"A contract with St. Michael!" he muttered. "What an idea!"

And suddenly he gripped Lillian's wrist. His tones were gentle, tenderly sympathetic.

"Oh, dear child, this must be terrible for you! To be thrown away——"

"I don't mind for myself," she assured

him hastily, though the words were unsteady. "It's Ranny I'm thinking of. He—Ranny insane! And ready to do anything!"

"Yes, it is bad."

"Amos, I came to you because—because I know you so well. You must help."

"Help? Why, Lillian, what on earth can I do?"

She slid close to him and spoke confidently into his ear.

"Amos, you must see mother and Ranny and the doctor. You can talk to mother; try to make her feel it's not so—so awful as she thinks it is. Oh, Amos, she's simply broken up about it! She wept as she did the time father died! Ranny meant so much to all of us. You can comfort her, Amos; you must."

"Well," he agreed dubiously, "I guess I can try that. But about Ranny and the doctor?"

"About Ranny—talk to him, Amos; try to make him see things, understand things. He knows you, he'll listen to you. Maybe you can change him. Oh, I don't know! Do anything you think will help! As for Doctor Emery, consult him, Amos. I attempted it, but I was so excited and nervous and hurt that I didn't understand half of what he told me. Please, Amos, help us!"

"Of course—of course," he promised in an attempt to assuage her rising emotion; but he felt far from confident to cope with the strange situation. To reason with a maniac who imagined himself privileged to commit any form of atrocity presented a gigantic problem. But old Amos, as always obliging, promised. His heart ached for this girl whose future had been welded with that of the unfortunate Randolph Burford. Seeing her robbed of the life which was to have been hers sent a queer pain through him. He loved Lillian Chester with the comprehensive love of the old for the young.

"I knew I could come to you, Amos," she said fervently; and in that flattery the organist found his reward for all he was undertaking. He smiled, as his hand caressed hers.

"All right, Lillian, all right. I'll come in to see mother to-morrow morning. You tell her that."

"And the others?"

"The others? Oh, I'll see them to-morrow, too. To-morrow——" That was the distinguishing characteristic of the meek Amos Hobart. He worshiped an eternal to-morrow. Forever he was planning to do something on the morrow—and occasionally enacted his plans. But nobody objected. Anything concerned with the old man was fixed as immovable as the north pole, as constant as the light of the sun.

Lillian leaned forward, pleading:

"You're sure you will, Amos? You won't forget?"

"Of course I'll do it, child. You know you can count on me. To-morrow——"

Unexpectedly she pecked a little kiss on his withered cheek. He caught his breath, stared at her almost invisible face, and gulped. For the first time in many years a flush began creeping into his countenance; and to conquer the embarrassment he laughed—a short, meaningless laugh.

"Why, Lillian, of course I'll do it!"

She rose, still holding his hand.

"I'll expect you in the morning, Amos. And mother will be happy to see you. Now I'll go, while you close up."

"Good night, dear girl," he stammered, attempting to be cheerful.

"Good night" she replied, with a final pressure upon his hand.

She disappeared in the blackness.

Amos Hobart went back to the organ stool. He sat upon it and gazed thoughtfully at the keys shining under the light. Then he began to close the organ. He was thinking of Ranny Burford, a man bartering half his life for a chance to be wicked. And, as he thought, old

Amos heard for the second time that night his name whispered in the darkness of the empty church. But this time it was the voice of a man.

CHAPTER II.

RANDOLPH COMES TO CHURCH.

HE sprang to his feet, choking a cry of fear. He recognized that smooth voice, its melodious suavity. He glared toward the altar; from the darkness emerged the tall figure of Randolph Burford.

The insane man stepped forward until he stood in the faint light. He was dressed in black, so that only his face and his hands were clearly visible. Ranny had an unusual face.

It was thin and long. Under straight, dark hair, usually flatly combed, he possessed eyebrows which women envied. They were narrow, tapering to needle points; and always they moved. Every thought of the man was expressed in the constant motion of those brows. His lips, too, were thin and restless.

Now weird shadows played on his features, fully a foot above the startled eyes of the organist. Amos eyed the face with fright which he could not conceal. On it lay something devilish; its cruelly triumphant smile was unnerving.

"Hello, Ranny!" stammered the old man.

"Good evening to you, my dear Amos. Are you surprised by my coming?"

"Why—I—naturally! You never came before at night, Ranny."

"No; that's true."

"I—er—won't you sit down?" A sense of helplessness surged through Amos. He was afraid; never before had he been in the company of a madman; he was confronting an unknown terror.

"No, I won't sit down. I'll talk."

"Talk? Why—oh, of course! Go right ahead, Ranny. Do you feel quite well? Perhaps a glass of water——"

"Never mind my health. I'm feeling well."

"That's good! I knew you'd pull through. The accident——"

"Amos, keep quiet!"

The command was snapped irritably. Randolph was scowling; deep shadows hovered over his sensitive brows. And Amos quaked. A series of doubts and queries were swirling through his mind. Why was Ranny out alone, unguarded? Why had he come here? What did he wish to say? And what would he *do*? With a tremendous exertion of power the old man regained control of himself.

"I am listening," he said simply.

"And so was I a few minutes ago." A leer displaced the scowl on the madman's features.

"So were you! What do you mean?"

"When Lillian was here! I heard everything she said to you!"

"You did? Well, that's—that's strange." Amos could think of nothing better to say. Within him something had become paralyzed; words tumbled from his lips before he could formulate them. He heard himself and wondered that he was speaking at all.

"Yes, I was standing back there in the darkness, near the altar."

"Funny we didn't hear you. Yes——"

"It isn't funny. I was hiding."

"Oh, I see."

"And I was laughing."

"Well?" Amos' fingers fidgeted about each other. His lips suddenly were dry, and he wetted them with the tip of his tongue. Surely he would have to do something; he couldn't stand there conversing endlessly. Ranny would have to be brought back to Doctor Emery; he would have to be humored. "So you heard what we said, Ranny? And we never guessed you were near!"

"That's your fault."

"How did you come? Why?"

The stiffness of the insane man's body relaxed. He seemed tolerant and amused.

"I followed Lillian—that's how. She came to the doctor's this evening to talk about me, I suppose. Well, I told her I didn't want her any longer, told her to leave me alone; she wept like a silly child. I don't know why I followed her, but I did."

The last confession came to Amos as a revelation. He mentally rejoiced. The fact that Randolph had followed the girl was, to Amos, a sign that at times flashes of sanity were coming to the man; the old, deep-rooted love was asserting itself. Lillian had been cast aside in evidence of newly discovered privileges. Ranny had been proving his strength to himself. And then a reaction had struck him. The organist spoke more easily.

"So you were eavesdropping, eh, my boy? Well, well! Don't you know such a thing is wrong?"

"Wrong?" Randolph almost shouted. His hands leaped forward, clutched the shaking shoulders of the old man. The thin, æsthetic face with its convulsive brows was lowered close to the gray, lined countenance.

"Wrong?" he repeated savagely. "You old fool, don't you know that nothing can be wrong for me? *Nothing!* I'm not bound by the rules of right and wrong. I'm free! I can do what I please! Don't you mention wrong to me, Amos!"

The organist's cheeks were white. He would have given all his earthly possessions for a chance to dash away. But forceful hands were gripping his shoulders, the fingers sinking into his flesh painfully. If only some one else were in the blackness of the church, some one to help! But he was alone.

"I—I don't understand, Ranny. Please let go——"

"Listen! I'll *make* you understand, you and everybody else! I heard Lillian tell you I'm crazy." You believed her. Others will believe her. But I'm not! I'm perfectly sane, just as sane as you!

Don't I know you? Don't I speak intelligently? Don't I know what I'm saying? I'm sane, Amos! Absolutely sane! And when you understand that, I'll explain why there's no such thing as wrong for me—why I could *kill* you now, if I cared to!"

Frantically Amos was thinking. To disagree with a lunatic like Randolph Burford might arouse wrath, or more than wrath. The man had spoken of killing. Amos nodded quickly. He was blinking at the devilish features of the madman, contorted with fury.

"I understand—I understand!" he chattered.

"You'd better! Now listen to this: I have seen St. Michael. Don't tremble, you coward, don't tremble! Stand up like a man. I tell you, I have seen St. Michael. When I was sick in bed with my head stabbing me with pains, when you thought I was almost dead—then I saw St. Michael. I didn't want to die; then, at the time I had that hole in my head, I heard every one saying there was no hope. But I didn't want to die. I was young; I hadn't had my chance. So I spoke to St. Michael. And he told me that I would live. These idiots of doctors were wrong. I was to live to old age. But—but we talked—St. Michael and I. And we made an agreement, a contract. Lillian told you about it. It's true! I can do anything I please, provided I am willing to die on my thirtieth birthday. Don't tell me I'm insane, Amos Hobart! Don't you dare!"

"No—no, of course not!" stammered the terrified organist. He could not stop the shaking of his body. The intense earnestness of the lunatic awed him. More than ever he comprehended the seriousness of Randolph Burford's disease. Yet he could not act; he could not save the young man from his delusion.

Ranny continued, loosening his grasp:

"So you see there is no such thing as wrong for me. Everything is right. I could kill you on the spot without suf-

fering punishment. That is the contract. St. Michael will not break it! I can rob, destroy—do anything. And I intend to—for the two months I still have to live. Only one thing can interfere with me, and it's about that I want to talk to you."

Appealingly Amos looked around the darkness, though he did not know to whom he was appealing. At that moment the only thing which mattered was to break away from this madman; and yet to attempt it might bring fatal results.

"Go ahead," he said; "go ahead, Ranny, my boy."

"The only thing which can interfere with my plans," Randolph muttered with slow deliberation, "is your cursed law, your police. They can put me behind bars for my two months—put me where I won't be able to take advantage of my side of the contract. Only they can stop me—the police with their jails. And I don't intend to let them do it."

"Naturally you don't, naturally."

"Do you know how I'm going to prevent their doing it?"

"No."

"By not letting them know of my contract—that's how! And do you see how I'm going to do that?"

"N-no."

"By closing the mouths of all those who already know!"

A heavy silence fell over them. What did Ranny mean by "closing the mouths?" Not—not that he would kill those who knew! Heaven forbid! Amos gulped with difficulty. His legs were unsteady. An impulse to scream shot through him, but he reconsidered in time; if he called for aid, the deluded Burford might, in a fit of anger, act instinctively. Amos remained quiet, waiting.

"I could kill you now," said Ranny maliciously, "but I won't. You're not worth it. But this I promise you: if you meddle in my affairs, if you say one

word to the police, if you try to prevent my doing anything I choose to do, I'll come back and murder you! I swear it! Do you understand that?"

The old man choked out the words. "I—understand!"

"Remember, just one word about this to any one—and you're dead! I'll tell the same to Lillian—to any one who knows about me. Oh, I'll have my two months! I won't be cheated of them!"

"Yes—yes!"

"Any one who steps in the way—well, I won't be cheated!"

The tall figure straightened. A malevolent gleam shone in the eyes; the brows were drawn far down. And then Randolph smiled, a strange smile.

"I'm going back," he announced abruptly.

"Back where?"

"Back to Doctor Emery."

"Oh! You're going straight back?" Hopeful relief lay in the query.

"Perhaps."

"Does—does the doctor know you're here?"

A loud laugh came from Ranny. It echoed through the empty church, like a peal from the organ.

"No!" he cried jovially. "No, I sneaked out! And I'm going to sneak back. The fool thinks I'm sleeping in my room!"

Amos forced a responsive laugh from his dry throat.

"That's funny," he said. "That's funny! But you'll go straight back, Ranny? You won't stop?"

"Who knows, Amos? I'll do exactly as I please. If I decide to do anything else—experience the thrill of robbing or—or killing—who knows? I'm under no obligations."

"But——"

"But nothing. Shut up."

He turned and stalked off into the blackness. In an instant his voice came back threateningly.

"Remember, Amos, no meddling!"

"I'll remember."

"You'd better! Good night."

Amos Hobart was alone. A quivering hand stole across his forehead, wiping away the hot dampness. Suddenly he shuddered, felt his strength ooze out of his aged body. He sought his organ stool and upon it he sank gratefully. For a long time he sat still, breathing heavily, waiting for the shaking of his limbs to cease.

Poor Ranny! Good old Ranny so horribly changed! It was all incredible—the weird illusion, the boy's words, his beliefs. To think that a fall which had caused a gash in the back of Randolph's head could have such terrible results!

His insanity had not affected his memory; in many things he was rational. He knew people, recognized them, retained a hold on himself, sensed the dangers which threatened him. He was normal in everything save the fantastic notion of his contract with St. Michael. That was a monomania. And, as Amos pondered, he could readily comprehend the reason for such a brain disease.

Randolph Burford had been a student of religion. He had found unusual pleasure in the mystic study of creeds. To him the Deity had been an absorbing puzzle; he had made a hobby of trying to find an answer to that puzzle. And now the hobby had assumed ascendancy over him. He was its slave—or, rather, he was the slave of the horrible delusion that hobby had caused. Freudians would say he possessed a religious complex which had been twisted and warped by the accident to his brain. A plausible explanation; the thing was uncanny.

Old Amos closed his organ. From its top he lifted a battered slouch hat and a cane. He switched off the little light. Through the darkness he groped his way toward the door, as he had done night after night for many years. But, as he passed the altar, he paused. His eyes were closed, and he was trembling slightly. And yet he succeeded in

uttering a few hesitant words—the prayer of an aged man for a young man whom he loved.

"Please, O Lord, make him see the light! Bring him out of the darkness! Please, O Lord, please! Before it is too late!"

CHAPTER III.

AMOS KEEPS HIS PROMISE.

IT was very early the next morning when Amos Hobart rose from his bed. For an hour he had been endeavoring to recapture sleep, but his tossing had proved vain. He could not rest. Too many confused thoughts were galloping wildly through his mind.

Before a closed window he stood and stretched. He looked down into an alley, then lifted his gaze to view the pink flush in the sky above the roof of the adjoining house. For many days March clouds had hung over the city; he welcomed the cheer of a clear sky, but his welcome did not hold the customary enthusiasm. Indeed he had a lurking feeling that he would have preferred cloudy weather to conform with his mood. The happy glow of a rising sun was mockery.

On the edge of his bed he sat, his bony fingers running through his disheveled gray hair. He wore an old-fashioned nightgown of blue flannel—everything about Amos Hobart was old-fashioned—and, as he started to unbutton the garment at his throat, he paused. Two faces hung before his imagination; that of Lillian and that of Randolph.

Ever since the days when Lillian, as an exuberant child, had made a practice of darting into church on her way home from school, those two faces had been linked in his thoughts. He remembered distinctly how she used to dash into the sacred atmosphere, not a hint of dignity about her, and cry a cheery, "Lo, Amos!" Usually Ranny was close behind her. There had been embarrassing times when strangers visited the church and were startled by the unbecoming

conduct of the girl. But he had liked her impudence, her effervescent joy. Amos had never had children of his own; he permitted Lillian and Ranny to occupy the places of substitutes.

With Mrs. Chester, the girl's mother, he had been on terms of close intimacy for an infinitely long time! He had known the woman in her girlhood; and for twelve years he had been a steady visitor for Sunday dinner at the Widow Chester's. No other member of the parish dared to transgress upon the woman's rights by inviting Amos to visit on the Sabbath. One might just as fruitfully request services to be held on a day other than the day of rest.

And now, among all these friends of his, peaceful people and lovable, tragedy had intruded. For Ranny's plight was tragic. Somehow it was impossible for Amos to be certain that it was not all a dream on his part. Ranny couldn't have become so fiendish a creature! But the scene of the previous night recurred to him with its grim assurance that he was facing facts, not visions.

He had promised Lillian that he would attempt to console Mrs. Chester. Console her? For what? Amos shook his head pityingly. He knew that the good woman had bestowed the love of a mother upon the Burford boy; he was to have been her son-in-law; he was indeed a member of her heart's family!

Yes, it would be hard to ease the widow's sorrow; but Amos was resolved to try.

He dressed slowly. And when he stood in readiness for breakfast, he discovered that he would be compelled to wait an hour before his landlady served that meal. It was only seven o'clock.

Eventually, however, he came down the porch steps of the colorless house in which he had boarded for the past decade. Though a warm sun was shining, melting the last remnants of the winter snows, he buttoned his loose gray overcoat snugly. His hat was drawn

down over his eyes. And he trudged along moodily, the tapping of his cane lending rhythm to his progress.

Every one knew Amos Hobart and his peculiar, round-shouldered shuffle. He received a dozen wishes for a good morning, but he merely mumbled some vague reply and continued toward Mrs. Chester's house. Many eyes followed him in wonder; not every day was old Amos so surprisingly uncivil. There must be a reason.

In this suburb of the city, life was just awakening. A few men were starting for their offices; automobiles were backing out of garages, with sirens shrieking their warnings. Grocers' delivery wagons rattled through the streets. But Amos saw nothing. Scowling at the sidewalk he moved on doggedly.

When he reached the fence which separated the fifteen feet of lawn before the Chester house from the street, he hesitated. He glanced casually at the dining-room window. Its shade was down.

"Too early," he decided in submission to an onslaught of momentary nervousness. "Can't wake people at this hour!"

Accordingly he walked on a few blocks, then turned back.

But at last he rang at Mrs. Chester's door; and the lady herself admitted him.

"Oh, Amos—you! Good morning!"

"Morning," replied the old man and entered.

He eyed Mrs. Chester closely, disapprovingly.

"Rose, you've been crying," he said in tones which accused and questioned. She looked down.

"A—little."

"Well, you must stop that sort of nonsense!" Though he spoke with authority, Amos felt no confidence in himself. He, too, would have wept, were he as sentimentally weak as Rose Chester. While he hung his coat and hat on the rack, he watched her surreptitiously.

She was a small, fragile woman, with

world-weary eyes, heavy-lidded and dull. Her wisps of gray hair fell away from a part in the middle of her unprepossessing coiffure. About her hovered an air of sadness which she often struggled to overcome, as she was doing now, with a mirthless smile.

She wore a dress of faded blue and an apron. Somehow her husband's death, six long years ago, had sapped her of all vitality. She was merely a shadow of the old Rose Chester. But to this Amos had accustomed himself.

"Where's Lillian?" he asked.

"She'll be down; it's early, Amos. Have you had breakfast?"

"Uh-huh."

"Well, come in and have a cup of coffee with us."

Mrs. Chester led the way into the modest dining room, and, as he sat at the table, Amos sensed the tenseness of the atmosphere. The hostess spilled coffee on the tablecloth—something she never did unless a severe nervous strain gripped her.

Lillian came down soberly. Her nod to Amos carried a message of gratitude as well as greeting. And the three of them, bosom friends, sat silently, hesitating to meet each other's glances.

He noticed that Lillian, though fresh and lovely in a flimsy pink dress, showed signs of tears as clearly as her mother. He frowned at his cup. Not until Lillian's foot prodded him under the table did he begin to talk.

"Rose," he said uncertainly, "there's no use being so glum. The boy is all right; just a little sick for a while, maybe. But he'll come through. No sense in moping too much."

He had opened not only conversation, but the floodgates to Mrs. Chester's emotions. At once she emitted a sharp sob. Her handkerchief was snatched from her sleeve, and she wailed:

"You don't understand, Amos! How can you talk like that? He—he—how do we know what he'll do?"

"Oh——"

"It's not what he thinks, Amos. Maybe we can cure him of that. But what will he *do*? What will he do? Suppose—suppose—suppose he *kills* somebody? Then what?"

"Now, now," Amos retorted with a great display of confidence, "you know our Ranny won't do anything like that! What's the use of being silly? He won't do that—no—no-o-o!"

Lillian leaned forward eagerly.

"Of course he won't, mother. I asked Doctor Emery, and the doctor says that even if Ranny talks a lot about doing—doing things, he won't do them. He's still sane enough for that. He knows what's right and what's wrong."

Amos coughed. He eyed his cup fiercely. Right and wrong! Ranny knew!

"Certainly he knows that. He's not so dangerously insane."

"What I want to know," cried Mrs. Chester, thumping her little hand on the table, as she glared at Amos through her tears, "is: why don't they put Ranny in an asylum till he—he recovers? Or, why don't they report his case to the police? Heaven knows I don't want to see the boy locked up, but, oh, I don't want to hear that he's done anything wrong! That'll be unbearable! For his own protection he ought to be confined in some place!"

"Now——"

"What I want to know is: why don't they confine him? Why doesn't Doctor Emery send him away till he recovers? Can you tell me that?"

"No, but——"

"Will we be happier," she persisted hysterically, "if we hear that he's killed some one, or robbed some one, or defied the laws of God? Will we? Do we have to wait for that?"

Amos scarcely could answer. Desperately he was trying to make a suitable reply, but words did not present themselves. Lillian came to his assistance.

Doctor Emery explained all that, mother."

"What'd he say, eh? Can you tell me?"

"Why—why—he said Ranny wasn't as insane as we thought. He said Ranny wouldn't commit any wrong. There was no need to worry. He'd be all right in a few weeks, if we allowed the doctor to give him proper care."

"Ah!" exclaimed Mrs. Chester in disgust, as she pressed the handkerchief to her nose. "Nonsense!"

"And then, if Ranny were sent to an asylum among other lunatics, he would grow worse instead of better. We can't risk that."

"But the police?"

"Oh, that's something else."

"Yes," Amos interrupted, "that's something else. Why should we have our Ranny arrested? As yet he hasn't done anything criminal."

"Must we wait for him to do it?" demanded the whimpering woman.

"He won't," he assured her. The hypocrisy of his position was beginning to disgust him. He exchanged a worried glance with Lillian. Bravely the girl endeavored to appear at ease; she sipped her coffee calmly, though the cup shook perceptibly.

"Yes," snorted Mrs. Chester, "it's easy to say that. But you'll lose all that confidence just as soon as you hear that Ranny has——"

"Mother!" ejaculated Lillian, finding the strain of passivity too great. "Please stop it! You're excited because of what Ranny told me. You're afraid that the wedding will never take place! Oh, I know it, mother. Don't attempt to deny it! But let me tell you, Ranny will change! You wait—wait—oh, till his birthday! When he discovers that he isn't dying—well, you just wait! He'll come back to his senses!"

"Let's hope so," mumbled the lady, sniffing less audibly. "Still, some one ought to tell the police. It's our duty,

for the safety of the people around here."

Amos grunted.

"No," he said, "we don't have to do that. I agree with Doctor Emery. Ranny may talk of doing criminal things, but he won't actually do them. He's always been a good boy. The course of his life can't change so easily. And, besides, Doctor Emery will be with him almost constantly. He'll be under guard all the time. No need to worry, Rose. We'll simply wait."

Mrs. Chester sank under the weight of the combined pressure exerted by her daughter and the old man. She shrugged resignedly.

"Well, if you really think so——"

"Of course," replied Amos, "of course."

Again silence dropped upon them, while Lillian and her mother pecked without appetite at a tasteless breakfast.

Amos Hobart filled his pipe, a heavy, well-stained source of comfort. When he lit it, the pungent fumes permeated the air, and he breathed deeply. His eyes followed the spiral of blue smoke twisting toward the ceiling. Funny, he mused, how a pipe could restore a man's powers to think clearly.

And, as he puffed with satisfaction, the doorbell rang. Its sudden thrill stabbed the quietness, so that Amos started instinctively. But he settled back with a smile, as Lillian went to the door.

He could hear the caller's conversation distinctly. It was a delivery boy from the grocer's, and he prattled of the weather, of the new brand of tea his store had received, of fresh eggs and butter and spices and bread. But unexpectedly he said something which caused both Amos and Rose Chester to stiffen and become pallid—to eye each other in comprehending terror.

"Say, Miss Chester," the boy's voice exclaimed, "d'ye hear the news this morning?"

"News? No."

"Old man Hanover was murdered. found in his place this morning. You know where he lives, don't you? Right near the church, in that yellow house. Yeh; cops say he was shot last night. Somebody saw a tall guy run from the place. Oh, yeh, there's a lot of excitement. G'morning, Miss Chester, g'morning!"

The outer door slammed. Lillian did not come in, and Rose Chester, white and wide-eyed, gaped across the table at Amos.

"Good Lord!" she murmured. "I wonder—do you think—Ranny——"

But Amos was rising unsteadily. Old man Hanover—in the yellow house near the church—last night. He stumbled out of the dining room, snatched his hat and coat and cane, avoided the terrified stare of Lillian, leaning against the wall in the corridor; and he staggered out into the street. An unspoken prayer hung on his lips.

CHAPTER IV.

A VISIT TO DOCTOR EMERY.

SEVERAL blocks from Mrs. Chester's street ran an imposing avenue known as Seaview Parkway. The fact that one had to travel its entire length, perhaps eight miles from the city, before obtaining a glimpse of the sea did not discourage the use of that alluring name.

The Parkway was lined with dignified trees which made no effort to bend in order to observe the continuous stream of automobiles which coursed under their branches. Back of the trees were rows of dignified homes, planted from each other at dignified distances and crouching behind the sidewalks in dignified solemnity. Dignity ruled the avenue. It was the highway of suburban aristocracy.

Its residences were occupied by attorneys and doctors and judges, with an occasional manufacturer intruding here and there. When one attained financial

success, or if one desired to impart the impression of having attained financial success, one moved to Seaview Parkway.

On this street a sprawling, yellow house, built on the antiquated principle of durability, bore a swinging shingle which announced that Doctor Douglas C. Emery had chosen that site for his home.

Every one in the neighborhood could speak with authority of Doctor Emery. More than a man of medicine, he characterized himself as a psychoanalyst. There was a ponderous book, "The Inner Mind," which advertised his name to a curious world. Upon it his reputation heavily rested. He was the sort of gentleman who could nod haughtily to a judge and await the judge's advances for greater familiarity. He never crossed the street to meet people; he waited, buttoning his gloves, while they crossed toward him. And no one thought it improper. He was the eminent Douglas C. Emery.

Upon him had devolved the duty of caring for Randolph Burford. Several reasons explained this circumstance. In the first place Doctor Emery had for years been the family physician of the Burfords. Now that the older generation had gone, he bestowed his attention upon the younger set, which was composed of only Ranny.

After Ranny's unfortunate fall he had been carried to the doctor's residence. And there he had remained—not merely a patient, but an experiment. The strange antics of the boy's brains had forced the interest of the psychoanalyst-physician.

On the eventful morning which brought the news of the murder to the Chester home, Doctor Emery was sitting in his library. He leaned far back in an easy-chair, his hand stroking his smooth, square chin. Doctor Emery was scowling. He had just been informed of the occurrence at "old man" Hanover's. With careful fingers he adjusted his

morning coat—a garment in keeping with his dignity—and then ran a caressing hand over his silver hair. This done, he resumed his scowling.

A maid, young and undeniably attractive, as were all the doctor's servants, stood in the door.

"A gentleman to see you, doctor. Mr. Hobart."

A flash of annoyance, mingled with boredom, crossed the physician's countenance. He waved a dismissing hand.

"Ask him to wait in the reception room. I'm busy at present." His voice was resonant, ringing with the authority of one who has become a dominant figure.

"Yes, sir."

She vanished, but returned in a moment. This time she seemed somewhat embarrassed.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but the gentleman says it's not a professional call. It's personal. He'd like to see you at once."

Doctor Emery looked up with disapproval. Usually his directions were accepted without question.

"Who did you say it is?"

"Mr. Hobart—Amos Hobart. You know, sir, the organist at the church."

"Oh, that fellow!" The doctor rose, sighing. He buttoned his morning coat. "I can't imagine what he wants. Well, show him in. I've a few minutes to spare."

Nervously holding his hat and cane in one hand, Amos shuffled into the room. He eyed the physician, glanced around at the book-lined walls, coughed. His shoulders, drooping under the loose coat, seemed more bent than ever.

"Good morning," he began, faltering. "If you've got a few minutes, Doctor Emery, I'd like——"

"Have a seat," was the brusque invitation. "I must leave for the hospital in a short time, but if you wish to consult me——"

"Exactly, sir!" Drawing the tails of

his coat into his lap, Amos sought the comfort of a huge chair. He sat on its edge, peering anxiously at Doctor Emery who settled again into his easy chair. "I've come to consult you about——about Ranny——Randolph Burford."

The physician shifted his position, cleared his throat.

"Oh, yes," he said.

"We all know of his terrible affliction."

"All? What do you mean by all?"

"Oh, Mrs. Chester and Lillian Chester and I. We know."

"Hum! Well, what of it, Mr. Hobart?"

Amos bent far forward. His tones were hushed, tense.

"Where is he? Where is Ranny?"

"Burford? Upstairs in his room. Why?"

"Because——because—— Have you heard of the Hanover murder?"

"Ye-es; I heard this morning."

"Listen, doctor! You may not know this. Last night Ranny visited me in church. My church is very close to the Hanover house. Ranny was——was in a bad state. He threatened many things. He even spoke of killing. Do——do you think *he* could have done it?"

Doctor Emery's hand was raised to his chin. His lips were pressed together tightly, as he frowned at the floor. With hesitant softness he answered:

"Do you know, Mr. Hobart, that——that's what is worrying me? I wonder if it *was* Ranny. He left the house last night without my knowledge. I wonder——"

"Could we ask him? Do you think he'd tell?"

"I can't say. We might try."

"Then let's do it——let's do it! If only he says he didn't!"

After a moment's consideration the physician appeared to agree. He summoned the maid and requested her to call Mr. Burford to the library.

Amos continued eagerly:

"I can't believe he had anything to do with it. I know the boy."

"But you don't know the intricacies of his insanity."

"We'll hear right away—we'll hear. But there's something else I'd like to ask, doctor."

"What's that?"

"Why aren't you reporting Ranny's condition to the police, so that he may be protected from himself? Mrs. Chester recommends it."

At this query Doctor Emery rubbed his hands on his knees. He seemed uncertain of what reply to make but finally said:

"That is difficult to explain, Mr. Hobart—quite difficult. Frankly, I don't want the authorities to take him from me because I think I can cure him. It is a valuable experiment at any rate. I believe he can be cured within a few months."

"But we'll have to report it now—now that the murder has taken place."

"Not at all!" The words were snapped out with sudden fierceness. "It isn't necessary to do that, Mr. Hobart! We have no proof that Burford is guilty, even if he confesses guilt; an insane man cannot be held accountable. There is no need to report anything. We may have suspicions. We have no facts."

At the tirade of opposition Amos succumbed quickly. He was no man to argue with Douglas C. Emery. He found solace in another cough and waited for Ranny to appear.

The insane Randolph was, to judge by outward evidence, entirely sane, as he entered the library. He greeted the physician cordially and started with some surprise when he spied Amos almost cringing in his chair. Yet he was pleasant.

His fiendish expression had disappeared. He was Ranny, the tall, somewhat handsome, thin, dark Ranny. Amos felt a rising swell of joy within him-

self, but it subsided at once, for a strange light sparkled in the insane man's eyes. It was a wild light, unnatural.

"Why did you come, Amos?" he demanded.

"To see Doctor Emery."

"Why do you wish to see Doctor Emery?"

"About—oh, about things." An appeal for aid lay in Amos' glance to the physician. It was answered.

"Mr. Hobart and I had some matters to discuss, my boy. Sit down, please. I believe Mr. Hobart has something to ask you."

"Ask me?" Suspicion lent an upward inflection to the phrase; but obediently Ranny sat, his eyes searching the features of the restless visitor. "What do you wish to know, Amos?"

The organist tugged at the lapel of his coat. He stammered something, then said:

"You know about the—er—the murder of Hanover, Ranny. You have been told, I suppose."

Uttering a half-stifled cry Randolph jumped out of his chair. Menacingly he advanced, his fists clenched. Startled beyond words, Amos Hobart fell back in his chair. But a quick command from the doctor brought the crazed man to a stop. He glared wrathfully.

"Why are you mentioning that, Amos? Answer me—why?"

Amos did not answer; and Ranny demanded:

"You think I did it, do you? You want a—a confession from me? That's why you came?"

"Now—now," stammered the amazed Amos, "I didn't say anything like that; did I, Ranny, my boy? I didn't say I thought you did it. I couldn't say such a thing. The doctor heard me. I never hinted at it. I never questioned you that way. You're too—too hasty. But did you kill Hanover, Ranny?"

The last question was spoken tremu-

lously, fearfully. It came as a surprising climax to Amos' denial, but the old man could not suppress the anxiety which was storming within him. The query escaped in spite of himself. He was sorry the instant he uttered it. What the consequences might be he dared not guess. He waited either for a reply or for an attack. Neither came. Randolph turned to Doctor Emery. The two men eyed each other. At last the physician, in an extremely low tone, suggested:

"Why don't you speak, Burford?"

And Ranny spoke in a snarling, threatening tone, while his face became flushed, and his finger shook at Amos.

"You old fool, I warned you not to meddle in what I did! I warned you to keep your mouth and your eyes shut! It's none of your business—this Hanover affair. Maybe I killed him, and maybe I didn't. If it will do your conscience any good to think I didn't do it, then all right—that's my answer; I didn't kill Hanover. But that's neither here nor there, Amos. You've got to keep your nose out of this. You know too blamed much. I'm going to keep my eye on you. If you whisper just one word to any one, if you report me to the police, as you'll want to do, Amos, I'll come to you through hell and kill you! I won't be cheated of my two months by any cranky old weakling's prattle! I won't, I tell you! You get up and get out of here! And if you do one other thing in connection with Hanover's death, or with me, or with Doctor Emery, I'll kill you!"

Amos swallowed forcefully. He felt

the dampness on his forehead. Despairingly he looked at the doctor, then back into the blazing eyes of Randolph Burford.

"Ra-Ranny," he gasped, "I don't want to do you harm, my boy! I don't! All I want is to feel sure you didn't kill Hanover! In the streets they're talking—talking. Some one saw a tall man run from Hanover's house toward here. Ranny, don't you understand? They'll get you! I want to fight with you—to show them you didn't do it! Tell me the truth, Ranny—who killed Hanover?"

The pitiful emotion in old Amos' words, hysterical in their earnestness, caused the madman to pause before replying. Once more he turned toward Doctor Emery. Once more a message seemed to fly from one eye to the other. And Ranny at last said hoarsely:

"I won't tell you a thing! Get out of here, Amos! Get out! If you meddle once more, I—I'll kill you!"

Doctor Emery rose. He winked meaningly at Amos Hobart. His hand motioned toward the door, while he addressed the lunatic with soothing phrases.

A minute later a trembling, dazed old man stumbled down the steps of the yellow house on Seaview Parkway. For a moment he leaned against the iron fence; then, pulling his coat about himself tightly, he shuffled down the street. A turbulent urge to scream into the silent morning swept over him, but he choked the impulse and moved away, his cane tapping the sidewalk in broken rhythm.

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.

THIEF TAKES STOVE FROM CHURCH

THE person who recently stole the stove from the Allen Church a few miles from Port Huron, Michigan, has been characterized by the police of that city as "the meanest thief" they have come into contact with. The loss of the stove was not discovered until the congregation had assembled for Sunday services, when only the stove pipe was to be found. Members of the congregation organized themselves into a "snooping committee" to make the rounds of secondhand stores and junk dealers in an effort to find the stove.

Mr. Clackworthy Pays His Income Tax

by Christopher B. Booth

Author of "Trimmed to the Quick," "Hooked," etc.

FOR the past eight months Mr. Amos Clackworthy, the master confidence man, had been a strictly law-abiding citizen, and, since his income was derived solely from those shrewd schemes which had enabled him to poach so successfully upon the rich preserves of unwary bank balances, his earnings had been distressingly nil. Having accustomed himself to a life of comparative opulence, he found it difficult, if not impossible, to curb his expenditures, and accordingly, the state of his finances was rapidly becoming a matter of apprehensive concern.

Mr. Clackworthy had not voluntarily suspended operations, nor was his quest of the easy and unethical dollar in any wise less persistent; but, with equal persistency, his best-laid plans—to quote Burns, one of his favorite poets—had "gang aft a-gley." Circumstances had combined against him, and that indefinite thing we call Luck had jilted him cruelly and repeatedly.

The Early Bird, Mr. Clackworthy's slangy coplotter and chief assistant, who had a streak of superstition in him, blamed everything on the fact that the master confidence man, in accepting the change from a twenty-dollar bill, had carelessly accepted five twos. A two-dollar bill, according to The Early Bird, was the symbol of evil fortune; he would have considered it safer to carry a rattlesnake in his pocket.

There is nothing that begets confidence so quickly or so surely as a show of ready money in generous quantities; a big factor in his success as a confidence man had been his working capital, the wherewithal to impress prospective victims of his financial solidity. The situation was becoming serious; his supply of cash had already been exhausted, and only that morning it had been necessary for him to make a last and final dip into the safety-deposit box, where there had reposed certain bonds. These he had converted into money with which to rehabilitate the checking account at his bank in The Loop.

Returning from the bank to his Sheridan Road apartment, Mr. Clackworthy paused at the entrance of his luxurious living room, bewildered by the disorder and confusion. Sheets of paper were scattered over the floor, and The Early Bird, seated at the rosewood table, was a picture of despair. His collar was torn loose from its moorings, his hair, usually parted precisely in the center, was rumpled wildly.

At the moment of Mr. Clackworthy's entrance, The Early Bird, releasing a torrent of harmless, original profanities, grabbed up a handful of papers covered with a jumble of penciled figures and tossed them to the four corners of the room.

"Yah!" he shouted, as he leaped to his feet. "I'd rather go to jail!"

"My dear James!" exclaimed Mr.

Clackworthy, aghast. "What's come over you? One would think you'd gone out of your mind."

"And that ain't a lot from bein' the plain, positive, sad, an' actual truth, boss! The old bean's headed for the silly house, reason is totterin' from its throne—which is a highbrow line that I heard you pull once. I stopped myself just in time." He staggered back into the chair, pressing his hands to the side of his head.

Mr. Clackworthy was not sure whether he should be amused or not. Open at the table was a dictionary; he found it impossible to imagine what The Early Bird had been up to.

"Speak up, man!" he commanded. "What's the occasion of all this excitement? Why have you littered up the floor of the living room with all these papers? Oh, confound you, James, you've spilled the inkwell on that seven-hundred-dollar Chinese rug."

"I know now why's there's anarchists," mumbled The Early Bird; "why guys go cuckoo an' toss bombs at Congressmen an' sit up nights tryin' to figger out ways of gettin' kill-'em-slow-an'-painful drops into some Senator's soup. Of course, boss, it's a pretty good government, an' I ain't sayin' the government's to blame, but——"

"James, you are crazy," Mr. Clackworthy said flatly.

"Not half so loony, boss, as the bozo that cooked up the mess. Say! Listen to this"—he reached to the table, grabbed up a sheet of paper with an angry gesture, and began to read aloud—"if desired, the net gain from the sale or exchange of capital assets acquired and held by you for profit or investment for more than two years, may be computed separately in Schedule D, instead of Schedule C, and a tax of 12 1-2 per cent paid on the income from this source in lieu of the regular normal tax and surtax, provided that the total tax, Item 31, shall not——'" He stopped reading.

Mr. Clackworthy threw back his head and laughed.

"So that's it?" he chuckled. "You've been making out your income tax return, eh?"

"Whatcha mean, 'makin' it out?" grunted The Early Bird. "A guy's gotta be a graduate from three universities an' have the gift of second sight to be jerry to that stuff. I been consultin' your old pal, Webster, tryin' to trim some of them five an' six-layer words down to my size, but——"

"Oh, come, James," interrupted Mr. Clackworthy; "there's no sense working yourself into this state. All you have to do is make a trip down to the Federal Building and any one connected with the Internal Revenue Collector's office will fill it out for you, free of charge. Besides which, my excited friend, you've got the wrong blank; your personal income hasn't exceeded five thousand dollars in the past twelve months."

"I'll say it ain't," grumbled The Early Bird. "Accordin' to my figgers, the government owes me this year, nineteen bucks comin' my way, howsoever I don't find no printed form for sendin' Uncle Samuel a 'Please remit.' Seems to me this tax thing oughter work both ways." He sighed heavily. "I reckon it ain't gonna take no three-ton truck to haul back the kale when Uncle Sam trots down to the bank to cash your check, huh?"

Mr. Clackworthy smiled feebly.

"I am afraid, James," he answered, "that if I paid my tax this year in nickles, dimes, and quarters, the sum total of it wouldn't bulge a man's pocket. I hadn't thought much about the income tax, as a matter of fact; there's plenty of time. The returns aren't due until the fifteenth of March, and that's three weeks off."

"I was tryin' to be patriotic," said The Early Bird; "they're askin' us to cough up early this year." He sighed again. "The jinx sure seems to be

keepin' us steady company," he added mournfully. "Didn't I tell you to lay off them two-case notes; didn't I warn you that it was bad luck to——"

"James," ordered Mr. Clackworthy, "I don't want to hear any more of that superstitious nonsense."

"Well, y'gotta admit——"

"I admit nothing so silly!" exclaimed the other with dignity. "Clean up this mess, and then we'll have a drink; if we were as well fixed at the bank as we are in our private cellar, I would be in a more cheerful state of mind."

The Early Bird, starting to pick up the scattered papers, looked apprehensive.

"What's the low-down on the bank roll, boss?" he demanded anxiously.

"Nine thousand five hundred," answered the master confidence man.

"An' with Ol' Man Hoodoo callin' every play we make! There's somethin' gotta be done; we gotta get the mitts onto some dough—quick."

"Admitted," agreed Mr. Clackworthy; "I have had in mind a certain Mr. Enos Skagway, but the bait with which to conceal our hook—I don't seem to be able to settle on just the proper twist."

"Who is this Shagway guy?" demanded The Early Bird without any particular enthusiasm. Mr. Clackworthy did not answer; frowning meditatively, he had stepped to the window which looked down upon Sheridan Road, his long, slim, fingers gently stroking his perfectly barbered Vandyke. Absently he watched a gang of street cleaners clearing off the previous night's snow.

Winter, raging into the city from across the open sweet of Lake Michigan, was dying a stubborn death. The sky was bleakly gray with the threat of more snow, and the weather man was pessimistic of early spring.

Into Mr. Clackworthy's eyes there came the gleam of dawning inspiration, and something like his normally expan-

sive smile appeared. As he turned away from the window, The Early Bird was quick to see the transformation.

"Y'got a idea buzzin' around in the old bean, ain'tcha?" he demanded eagerly.

"Thanks to you, my dear James, I have," nodded the master confidence man. "You have given me an idea—a splendid idea. It's a winner; Mr. Skagway is hooked right now. I know it!"

"Me—slipped you an idea?" gasped The Early Bird. "Aw, you're kiddin' me. I ain't let out a chirp."

Mr. Clackworthy chuckled.

"The credit belongs to you just the same," he said. "Pack our bags, James, for we're getting the train for Keysville."

"That's one of the burgs down in the southern part of the State, ain't it?"

"It is; the chief industry is coal mining."

"Whatcha goin' to do, boss?"

Mr. Clackworthy laughed teasingly.

"Well, James," he answered, "one of the important things that I shall do in Keysville is to pay my income tax."

And with this cryptic explanation The Early Bird had to be satisfied.

II.

Mr. Clackworthy and The Early Bird were on the train bound for Keysville, and the latter, his thin shoulders hunched forward, a cigarette drooping from the corner of his mouth, was trying to figure out what connection there could possibly be between the master confidence man's income tax and the trimming of Mr. Skagway. Mr. Clackworthy smilingly declined to explain; he loved his dramatic denouement with all the zeal of a theatrical director.

"Seems like this income tax thing is worryin' you all of a sudden, boss," he muttered complainingly. "How much has Uncle Sam gotcha on the hip for this year?"

The master confidence man did a swift mental calculation.

"Oh, I'd say roughly that six hundred dollars is a little more than the tax on my net earnings. It's been a lean year for us, James."

"Slim pickin's is right, boss. Say, what's the low-down on this Skagway gink, anyhow?"

"Mr. Skagway," answered Mr. Clackworthy, "is sometimes referred to as a 'captain of industry.' However, in Keysville he's not merely a captain, but a major general. He's a baby octopus, wrapping his greedy tentacles about almost anything in his home town that guarantees a profit.

"He is fifty-eight years old, a bachelor, and close to a millionaire. The only thing he loves better than a dollar is two dollars. He is president of The Skagway Trust Company, president of the Keysville Mercantile Company, president of a coal mining company, and vice president of another, stockholder in two others, an active, but not contributing, church member, and——"

"I gotcha, boss," broke in The Early Bird; "with that introduction I feel well enough acquainted with that goof to call 'im by his first name. How'dja get a line on his nibs?"

"That entails quite a story, James, but I shall make it brief. This story explains my eagerness to get at the business of reducing Mr. Skagway's surplus assets. You shall judge for yourself whether or not he deserves a good trimming—the stiffest that we can give him.

"Until something like two years ago the best-paying mine in the Keysville field was The Big Mogul, a wonderful grade of coal that commanded a higher price than the ordinary grades. Due to the formation of the vein, operating expenses were quite low, and, as a result, the profits were large. One of the big stockholders in The Big Mogul Company was Mr. Skagway, and——"

"Whatcha mean—was?" interrupted The Early Bird. "Why wouldn't a greedy guy like him freeze onto a good thing like that?"

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Clackworthy. "Thereby hangs the tale. As you may know, one of the big hazards in coal mining is fire damp, the spontaneous explosion of gases. There is no bitter without the sweet; The Big Mogul was a perfect mine except for the presence of fire damp. Several times there were serious explosions, and the mine caught fire. These fires, as they occurred, were walled off, and the mining continued. There's no extinguishing them; in some of the old mines the coal has been burning for many years, underground furnaces with the fuel to keep them going for a century or more.

"The engineers of The Big Mogul knew that the mine was doomed, that it must be closed down, and the shafts sealed. Being a stockholder, Mr. Skagway, of course, had advance information of the true facts. He knew that stock in Keysville's best-paying coal mine was about to become absolutely worthless. It doesn't take much imagination to surmise what happened; Mr. Skagway——"

"Went fishin' for suckers an' got out while the gettin' was good, huh?" finished The Early Bird.

"Precisely, James," nodded the master confidence man. "And his victim was a woman who looked to his advice and trusted his judgment—the most despicable form of dishonesty, in my opinion.

"There resided in Keysville a certain Mrs. Holloway, whose husband had been a good money maker, but also a good spender. Holloway died, leaving no estate except life insurance policies for fifty thousand dollars. The widow sought Mr. Skagway's advice, as banker and family friend. She wanted to know the best and soundest investment for her money. Skagway craftily pointed out

that six per cent on fifty thousand dollars amounted to only three thousand a year, and, having lived in splendid style, the poor woman had been accustomed to spend that much for her clothes alone. After a number of conferences Mr. Skagway, pretending that he could use the money to better advantage in other investments, agreed to sell Mrs. Holloway his stock in The Big Mogul mine. He told her that, if the mine continued its previous earnings, she would get between twelve and fifteen per cent on her fifty thousand dollars."

"She didn't have sense enough to be leery of it, huh?" snorted The Early Bird.

"Mrs. Holloway sunk her last dollar in Big Mogul stock, and then the mine closed down, just as Skagway knew that it would. She couldn't sell her stock certificates for the price of a hair net. There was no legal redress, no way for her to prove fraud, and the poor lady is now living in Chicago, eking out an existence as a dressmaker."

"Where'dja get wise to all that stuff, boss?"

"Quite by accident; she happened to do some sewing for Mrs. Bascom, the wife of our dear friend and frequent assistant. She told Mrs. Bascom the whole story, and Mrs. Bascom begged me to put Enos Skagway's name at the head of my list. That, James, explains why we are on our way to Keysville."

"Yeah, but it don't explain that stuff you was pullin' about comin' down here to pay your income tax. Ain'tcha goin' to play the record for me—ain'tcha gonna let me in on the know?"

Mr. Clackworthy chuckled.

"In the past, James, I have always possessed ample funds to make a big flash; I have been able to talk big money and to back up that talk with a check that was worth a hundred cents on the dollar. At present the cash is low; in these days of opulence a man with less than ten thousand dollars is a mere

beggar. Any common bootlegger can make a better showing than that. In successfully executing this scheme I must be a man of large substance."

"Huh!" grunted The Early Bird, impatient that he was not able to see through the scheme. "If this Skagway guy gets a peek at your income-tax return he'll see sad figgers what'll melt his icy heart, an' he'll dig down for a five-spot to relieve your distress an' sufferin'."

But Mr. Clackworthy only indulged himself in a confident laugh and lighted another of his forty-cent perfectos.

III.

Upon reaching Keysville the master confidence man put up at the best hotel—in which enterprise, incidentally, the prospective victim was a large investor—and immediately attracted much attention by demanding a suite of two bedrooms, two baths, and a sitting room. More than that, Mr. Clackworthy looked like the sort of man who was accustomed to such luxury.

He had arrived in the coal-mining town late in the afternoon, and the next morning he journeyed the length of three blocks to The Skagway Trust Company, The Early Bird accompanying him, where he deposited in cash the modest and unexciting sum of two thousand dollars; this amount drawn from his Chicago bank just before his departure from that city, left his home bank balance seven thousand five hundred dollars.

In the bank, also, he had his first glimpse of Mr. Skagway, whose desk stood on a sort of dais—like a king on his throne. Although there was a private office immediately behind him for use when the occasion arose, there was a strong streak of vanity in the man. He liked to feel people staring at his stern, harsh countenance; he even liked the stares of those who hated him for his hard and grasping nature.

Mr. Skagway was a man of small stature, but, as he reminded himself frequently, so was Napoleon; and he liked to strut and pose for the eyes of the multitude in true "little corporal" fashion.

There was no intention on Mr. Clackworthy's part of transacting any immediate business with the local financier. The time was not yet ripe, and he proposed that Mr. Skagway should approach him, for at no time did he want the banker to feel that he was being sought after. One look was enough to tell him that Mr. Skagway was of an instinctively suspicious nature and would draw back within his shell of cold, austere reserve at the first effort by a stranger to cultivate an acquaintance.

Keysville was a town of some fifteen thousand, not large enough for a man of Mr. Amos Clackworthy's dignified and imposing presence to be ignored, and he further attracted attention by reason of the fact that he seemed, during the first three days of his stay, to have no ostensible business in Keysville. In fact this inactivity moved The Early Bird to protest.

"Honest, boss," he wailed, "we gotta get some action—an' get it quick. If you was gonna take a vacation, why'dja pick out a punk burg like this?"

"I am now engaged in advertising," explained Mr. Clackworthy.

"Advertisin' what?"

"Myself. Keysville is beginning to wonder why I'm here."

"That's nothin'," snorted The Early Bird glumly; "I'm beginnin' to wonder the same thing, m'self."

"People are always curious concerning those they can't understand. I can tell by the way they look after us that we've succeeded in whetting the local curiosity. We are becoming a mystery."

So far, however, one resident of Keysville apparently cared not a tinker's hurrah who they were, why they had come, or how long they stayed. This was Mr.

Skagway who, as it happened, lived at the hotel; they had passed him several times in the lobby or in the dining room, but not a flicker of interest lighted the cold, gray eyes of the capitalist.

Before leaving Chicago Mr. Clackworthy had left certain instructions with George Bascom and George's pretty wife. In accordance with these instructions the fourth day brought a deluge of telegrams, a few of which Mr. Clackworthy answered. But still no intimation of his business in the coal-mining town. He seemed, also, to have forgotten all about making out his income-tax return.

Practically a week had passed before he did anything, and then he merely walked into the office of a certain Mr. Hooperwaite, a consulting and practicing mining engineer. If, during his five days in Keysville, Mr. Clackworthy had talked little, he had listened well, his ears drinking in every possible scrap of gossip about anything and anybody in town, sifting from out of this useless lot of haphazard information an occasional grain of value. Thus he had learned that Mr. Hooperwaite, the engineer, was "keeping company" with Miss Prudence Skagway, the banker's niece and only living relative, and that Mr. Skagway approved of Mr. Hooperwaite about as much as he ever approved of any one.

"I am looking both for some general and technical information," Mr. Clackworthy announced after introducing himself. "I understand you are familiar with the conditions at The Big Mogul mine. If a consulting fee of five hundred dollars—I will take only a few minutes of your time—is satisfactory——"

It was quite satisfactory, and Mr. Hooperwaite placed his information at the master confidence man's disposal, being exceedingly curious to know the object of this consultation.

"Of course you understand, Mr.

Clackworthy, that The Big Mogul is closed; the mine is sealed. Too bad! It was a wonderful property; a twelve-foot vein of coal, with practically only a handful of shale to the ton."

"Yes," nodded Mr. Clackworthy, "I was aware of that—which is precisely the reason I am interested. If all of the conditions are as I understand them, I shall acquire control of—you understand, Mr. Hooperwaite, that this is strictly confidential—the mine and resume operations."

Mr. Hooperwaite stared incredulously; this seemed on the face of it an insane statement for such a sane-looking man to make.

"There's a fire in the mine," he said. "It's not extinguishable."

"Ah!" murmured Mr. Clackworthy. "Is it now? That's the question, Mr. Hooperwaite—that's the question. There may be a surprise in store for you! Now we'll talk about The Big Mogul, if you please."

The engineer smiled with tolerant skepticism.

"You think it's possible to put out the fire in the mine?"

"I know it," Mr. Clackworthy answered positively, and he smiled shrewdly.

For the next hour Mr. Hooperwaite was busy answering questions, drawing sections and cross sections, talking of elevations, tunnels, and hoists until he had exhausted himself, and Mr. Clackworthy knew quite as much about The Big Mogul as he did.

Upon the departure of the master confidence man, the mining engineer did exactly what he had counted on doing—he left his office and went across the street to the Skagway Trust Company.

"Good morning, Mr. Skagway," he said pleasantly, with a deferential, not to say almost humble, bow.

"Humph!" the banker grunted.

"Something odd happened to me this morning, Mr. Skagway," went on the

engineer and aspirant to the hand of the banker's niece. "I wonder if you've noticed that we have a distinguished-looking stranger in town—that chap who's stopping at your hotel?"

Mr. Skagway looked annoyed.

"Do you think, young man, that all I've got to do is observe strangers who come to Keysville?" he snapped.

"His name is Clackworthy," went on Hooperwaite, "and he's gathering information about The Big Mogul. He thinks he's got a way to kill off the fire and reopen the mine."

"Then he's a darn fool!" muttered the banker. "I hope you didn't come in here to waste a busy man's time with such nonsense?"

The engineer stroked his chin.

"It does sound like bunk," he admitted, "but this Mr. Clackworthy certainly does not impress me as being anybody's fool. Oh, I know that some of the best mining experts in the country have told us that there's no hope for the mine, but I thought perhaps you'd be interested. This Clackworthy's no piker, anyhow—five hundred dollars consultation fee." And he exhibited the check, drawn upon The Skagway Trust Company."

"I am not interested," grunted Mr. Skagway; "and if you've nothing more important to talk about, I am a busy man, sir—a very busy man."

And yet the local financier was human enough to possess a certain curiosity. Mr. Clackworthy had sown his seed shrewdly. That evening at dinner the master confidence man saw the banker, from a neighboring table, looking toward him with an inquiring scrutiny that had not been previously apparent. Even The Early Bird noticed it.

"Look, boss," he whispered; "the old boy is givin' us the once-over."

"So I see," nodded Mr. Clackworthy. "If I mistake not he will very shortly seek to engage me in conversation. Things are beginning to come our way!"

This prophecy was fulfilled some twenty minutes later when the banker dropped into a chair—oh, quite casually, of course—within speaking distance of the master confidence man. Mr. Clackworthy puffed idly at an after-dinner cigar, leaving it to the other to make an opening. Mr. Skagway fidgeted for a moment and then took the plunge.

"It's—um—getting warmer," he said.

Mr. Clackworthy, staring absently past the local dignitary, aroused himself.

"I beg pardon," he murmured. "Were you addressing me?" His voice was cold, almost freezing.

"I said that it was—ah—that the weather—is—ah——" It disconcerted him immeasurably to be rebuffed in such a chilly fashion.

"Quite so," said Mr. Clackworthy, his tone sliding down to zero, just as Mr. Skagway himself had often cut short those who had attempted to drum up a conversation with him. The banker, his face flushed agrily at this affront, leaped up from his chair and stalked toward the stairs. The Early Bird was appalled.

"Gee, boss," he complained; "what's the idea of handin' him the grand freeze when he was gettin' ready to warm up to you?"

Mr. Clackworthy chuckled.

"I've made him notice us, and I've made him mad enough to biff me in the eye," he answered softly. "I don't want him to like me James; the old crook won't get a good night's sleep now until he's spiked my plans." He glanced at the calendar on the wall. "Let's be getting upstairs, James; to-morrow is the fifteenth—the last day for filing my income-tax return, and I want to juggle a few figures."

IV.

A little past noon the next day Mr. Clackworthy, wearing a distressed look on his face, strode into The Skagway Trust Company and approached the

throne of Keysville's financial king. Mr. Skagway looked up with a stare of utmost dislike.

"Well?" he snapped, hoping fervently that the mysterious stranger had come to ask a favor.

"As a banker," said Mr. Clackworthy, "you have probably acquainted yourself with the intricacies of this mad-house concoction called Form 1040. I am credited with being a fairly intelligent business man, but this income-tax return is beyond my powers of understanding. I thought I might prevail upon you to iron out a couple of difficulties.

"I've been so pressed with other matters that I forgot all about the income tax, and to-day is the fifteenth, the last day of filing. My attorney in Chicago had previously attended to this annoying detail, but I have just had his office on the long-distance telephone, and he's out of the city. No time for me to get to Chicago to-night, anyhow. Dash it all——" Here his voice broke off.

It was on the tip of Mr. Skagway's tongue that he was a bank president and couldn't be annoyed by any such petty business, but he checked himself, remembering that a man must bare his most intimate financial secrets in his statement to the government, and that chance, as he thought, had placed it in his hands to find out just who Mr. Clackworthy was.

"Come in," he said, motioning to the gate of the brass railing. "This is my busy day, but I shall spare the time to help you out of your difficulty."

Mr. Clackworthy entered the "holy of holies" and drew from his pocket a sheaf of papers and a small pocket ledger. Among the papers was the "work sheet" to be used in making the first rough draft of the tax return; from this Mr. Skagway was apprised that Mr. Amos Clackworthy lived in a very expensive section of Chicago, and that he was a "capitalist."

Without further ado they fell to work at the task in hand; it was straightway apparent to Mr. Skagway that he was in the presence of a man who could buy and sell him twice over—if, as the old saying has it, "figures can't lie."

"Interest on bank deposits, notes, mortgages and corporation bonds, \$12,000; profit from sale of stock and bonds, \$22,000; dividends on stock of domestic corporations, \$19,000." And so on down the list.

Mr. Skagway was amazed. Why, the man was a potential millionaire! Surely, he reasoned, a man of his standing must know what he was about when he said that he could reopen The Big Mogul mine, as ridiculous as it seemed.

"It's discouraging for a man to make money," grumbled Mr. Clackworthy. He added a few other caustic remarks, produced his check book and wrote, payable to the Collector of Internal Revenue, a check which reduced his balance in the Chicago bank to exactly one thousand nine hundred and sixty dollars, the lowest it had been in some years.

Mr. Skagway witnessed his signature and offered one of the bank's envelopes. In the sudden largeness of his heart he even furnished the postage stamp.

"Just send it along with your bank's mail, if you don't mind," requested Mr. Clackworthy and offered the banker one of his forty-cent perfectos. His glum expression remained until he had left the bank; he seemed in a remarkably pleasant frame of mind for a man who, his own cash almost at the vanishing point, had made the government a present of five thousand four hundred dollars more than it was entitled to.

V.

Two days later Mr. John Skipworth, one of the coal operators of the Keyesville field, dropped into the bank for advice. He was one of The Big Mogul

stockholders who had been caught holding the bag.

"Say, Skagway," he demanded, "what's in the wind? Are you in on this scheme to get hold of Big Mogul stock?"

"What's that?"

"This morning, Skagway, a fellow named Clackworthy came to me and offered me five hundred dollars for a fourteen-day option on my block of Big Mogul stock. Said he was willing to buy at par if he could get control of the company. Of course when the mine closed down, it was selling at almost one hundred and sixty dollars a share, but it ain't worth a plugged dime, as things stand. It's got me thinking."

The banker's frown showed that it had him thinking, too; Mr. Clackworthy was a rich man and a shrewd man, to judge from appearances and his income tax. He must be mighty sure of his plans to offer par for the stock. He remembered how the mysterious stranger had cut him short that evening in the hotel lobby, a slight that he would never forgive.

"Don't sell," he advised quickly; "if it's worth par to that fellow, there's something doing."

Skipworth nodded.

"Just the way I had it figured," he agreed. "Guess I'll hold on for further developments, but he's got options on quite a bunch of the stock. I don't think he's got quite as much as he wants. He seemed mighty eager to get mine; in fact he was so eager that I smelled a rat."

When Skipworth had departed, Mr. Skagway got busy on the telephone, calling up those who had been caught in the collapse of Big Mogul. There weren't many of them, for it had been a closely held corporation. A few simple calculations, after these phone calls, told him that Mr. Clackworthy had got options on exactly 800 shares—just lacking 201 shares of control. Most of

them, he was informed, the stranger had contracted for at twenty-five dollars a share. And he could well afford to pay a stiff price for the balance of it.

A large block of the stock was owned by Enrich Duggins, and Duggins was in Europe for the winter. There were just two ways for the man to get control—either buying Skipworth's holdings, or those of Mrs. Holloway who had the shares that Mr. Skagway had himself sold to her when he knew that The Big Mogul was doomed.

Mr. Clackworthy was anxious to get control and that was why he had been so willing to give Skipworth par. If he offered par he would give more. A slow smile spread over the banker's harsh features; there lay in his hands the power to get even with the stranger and at the same time make a neat little profit for himself.

The master confidence man's plans were sweeping along without a hitch, something like his old luck seemed with him again. The next day he called upon Mr. Skagway.

"I understand," he said, "that very shortly before the Big Mogul mine was closed down you disposed of your holdings to a certain Mrs. Holloway. My agents have tried in vain to locate her, and I am hoping that you can furnish me with her address. All of her old friends here in Keysville seem to have lost track of her entirely.

"Mrs. Holloway will be given a chance to realize something on her unfortunate investment, not what she paid for the stock, of course, but something. I know that as the person—ah—innocently responsible for her loss, you will be glad to see her get some of her money back." The word "innocently" was uttered in such a halting way that Skagway's cheeks burned hotly at the hidden accusation, and he longed to be at the other's throat.

"I may be able to locate the woman for you," he said shortly; "and then

I may not. What price would you be willing to give her for the stock?"

"What price wouldn't I give her?" retorted Mr. Clackworthy with seemingly indiscretion. "My plans have gone wrong, Mr. Skagway. I thought I had the control in my hands—picked up nearly all I wanted at twenty-five dollars a share, and then Mr. Skipworth became stubborn. Why, bless your life, he wouldn't even take par for it! He's trying to take advantage of me, trying to make me pay a big price because he thinks he's got me on the hip, and that I'll have to meet his terms. No, sir! Not until I have left no stone unturned to find Mrs. Holloway; not if I have to spend twenty-five thousand dollars for private detectives to trace her."

Mr. Skagway concealed an elated smile, for Mr. Clackworthy had made it clear how eager he was to get control of The Big Mogul. Very carelessly, it would seem, he divulged the information that he had a chemical process which would smother out any fire that had ever burned in a coal mine—a gaseous mixture that would not fail.

When Mr. Clackworthy had departed, Skagway dug through his files until he found a letter from Mrs. Holloway in which she beseeched him to return part, at least, of her life insurance money.

"I know it was business," she wrote, "but I thought you were to be trusted, and I depended solely on your advice. I am living almost in want, and if you would give me back only a little of the money——"

But he was not concerned with the letter; all he wanted was her address, a mean rooming house in the shabby portion of Dearborn Street. Mr. Skagway wrote down the address in his note book and within an hour caught a train for Chicago.

He would have been a most amazed man if he had known that, immediately after his departure, Mr. Clackworthy had withdrawn from the Keysville bank

what remained of his two-thousand-dollar deposit, paid his bill at the hotel, and an hour later was following him.

VI.

The next morning Mr. Skagway called upon Mrs. Holloway; he found her in a musty old house that forty years before had been a mansion. In the past two years she had become an old woman before her time. She received him with cold suspicion, managing to hide the elation which made her nerves quiver, for she was aware that there was a plan on foot to force the man to buy back the stock which she had bought so trustingly. By prearrangement Mrs. George Bascom was present.

"This—this is one of my—customers," quivered Mrs. Holloway when the banker glanced at the pretty Mrs. Bascom. "Speak right out in front of her if you've got anything to say; I've already told her how you tricked me into——"

"You do me a grave injustice, Mrs. Holloway," murmured Skagway. "But I presume I am wasting breath to tell you again that I did not know at the time I sold The Big Mogul stock to you, that the mine was in danger of being closed down, and that——"

"That's right—wasting your breath," Mrs. Holloway broke in grimly. "What did you come for, Mr. Skagway?"

"As innocent as the transaction was on my part," said the banker. "I realize that you acted upon my advice, and, since you have come to want, I thought perhaps we could adjust matters to relieve the suspicion that you were swindled. I thought perhaps, if I were to offer to pay a part of your loss—as you begged me to do in your letter—you——"

The window stared, as if she did not comprehend.

"Suppose, for example, that I would

assume—well, say ten thousand dollars of the unfortunate investment."

"You're going to give me back ten thousand dollars?"

"Yes, that's what it amounts to," said Mr. Skagway.

"Let's have it quick, before you change your mind."

"In order that you will not have to feel that you are an object of charity, Mrs. Holloway, we will let it assume a strictly business basis; I will buy back your stock for ten thousand dollars."

It was Mrs. Bascom who had something to say.

"Don't you do it," she advised. "I don't trust him. If he wants to do the right thing, he'll give you the money outright; he's got some reason for wanting the stock back. It's a trick, Mrs. Holloway! he's trying to get for ten thousand dollars the stock that you paid him fifty thousand dollars for!"

Mr. Skagway shot Mrs. Bascom a spiteful look; confound the woman, he could have handled Mrs. Holloway like a child except for this interference. But he held his temper, strictly as a matter of diplomacy. In an injured tone he insisted that this was an unfair imputation of his motives, and that he only came out of pity.

"Then give her the money and let her keep the stock," Mrs. Bascom insisted shrewdly. This cornered Mr. Skagway, and he tried a bluff.

"All right," he blustered; "just for that I'll give you nothing!"

"You take my advice," said Mrs. Bascom to the widow, "and catch the first train for Keysville. You'll find that there's something in the wind—that your stock has suddenly become valuable again. I'll pay your expenses."

This called the banker's bluff. For a moment he considered matters. He didn't know whether or not Mr. Clackworthy's plan for reopening the mine was feasible, and he didn't care. Mr. Clackworthy, a very rich man, believed

in the scheme and was determined to control The Big Mogul. He had to have the stock, and Mr. Skagway had not the slightest doubt in the world that he would pay one hundred thousand dollars for it under pressure; the man could well afford to pay that price when it was considered that he had got most of the eight hundred shares he had acquired; at twenty-five dollars a share. Even if he paid one hundred thousand dollars a share for the remaining three hundred shares, it would give him control of a five-hundred-thousand-dollar company for the total investment of one hundred and twenty thousand dollars.

"All right," he snarled, "I'll give you what I paid for the stock—fifty thousand dollars. Get out the shares; and I'll write you a check."

"Guess again!" said Mrs. Bascom, who seemed to have taken charge. "Your price is seventy-five thousand dollars—isn't it Mrs. Holloway?" And Mrs. Holloway agreed.

Mr. Clackworthy and The Early Bird were back home again. The master confidence man was in a highly exuberant mood, as he made a few figures on a pad of paper.

"A highly pleasing adventure, James," he chuckled. "Mrs. Holloway has back every penny of the money she never expected to see again, we have twenty-five thousand dollars for our share, from which there remains to be deducted an expense of six thousand eight hundred and forty dollars."

"What!" gasped The Early Bird.

"Y'ain't tryin' to tell me, boss, that we got rid of that much kale in a slow burg like Keysville. What-dja do with that much jack?"

"We paid five hundred to Hooperwaite, the mining engineer, and spent three hundred dollars on hotel accommodations and incidental expenses; added to that is a five thousand five hundred and forty dollar check that I sent to the government in payment on my income tax, and that brings the total to——"

"Income tax!" gulped The Early Bird. "Five thousand—boss, it ain't possible! You'd have to have the income from a million bucks to owe Uncle Samuel that much long green!"

"Exactly," laughed Mr. Clackworthy. "The amount actually due the government from me was two hundred dollars and I overpaid them five thousand three hundred and forty dollars."

"You got the old bean doin' a merry-go-round. I don't getcha—I don't getcha a-tall."

"The credit for the splendid idea belongs to you, James; it came to me when I saw you going through the agony of making out your return. I had not the capital to make an impression of great wealth upon Mr. Skagway, so I got him to help me make out my return. From the figures I gave him, Mr. Skagway concluded that I was a very rich man."

"It was the one way that I could win his confidence. Trot out the bottle, James, and we'll toast a blessing to the income tax that we've profaned with our hatred in the past."

QUARTER SHORTAGE CAUSES SUICIDE

THE death of John Fairbanks, Postmaster of West Chicago, which occurred a short time ago, is believed to have been due to worry caused by a shortage of 25 cents in the postal accounts. Fairbanks' body was found with a bullet wound in the head, apparently a case of suicide. Two weeks previous to his death Fairbanks telegraphed to Postal Inspector Germer that he was working overtime to make his books balance. An auditor had discovered a difference of 25 cents.

Ali Baba

by Edward Leonard.

Author of "The Mark of a Match," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE GUARDED MAN.

FROM close by came the sound of the sea, the lapping and the swish of waves upon the wide beach. But the girl standing at the end of the gravel path, her gaze straining toward the restless waters, could see nothing but the dark. The sky was hung with heavy clouds, as it had been all day, and the salty east wind which gently fanned her face bore a suggestion of rain. Behind her a hundred yards away at the other end of the path the casement windows of a big brick house glared brightly into the murky night, shedding their soft illumination on velvety lawns, on trim little garden plots, on rows of low hedges.

Suddenly near the girl a shaft of brilliant light appeared, picking her out of the blackness and revealing her as a slender, pretty blonde, dressed in white, with a housemaid's cap and apron. With a little gasp of alarm she turned quickly and discovered the night watchman, who had flashed his electric torch on her.

"O'Hara!" she cried, as the man came toward her. "I'd like to know what business you've got giving me a scare like this? You go sneaking around with no more sound than a mouse."

The watchman's round face spread into a grin. "That's what I'm here for, Minnie," he declared. "Sneakin' 'round lookin' for suspicious characters—that's my job."

"Oh, is that so!" the girl exclaimed with a toss of her head. "Seems to me

it's about time you did something more than look for 'em. Why don't you find 'em? And I'd like you to understand there's nothing suspicious about me."

O'Hara switched off his light. "What you doing all alone down here in the dark?" he inquired.

"I wanted to get away from the house, O'Hara. It gets on my nerves. I'm getting tired of my job. I'm going to give it up. This place may be all right in summer, for it's nice to be by the water, but summer's about over now, and it's going to be awful lonely around here pretty soon. And, anyhow, I'm sick of living in a house where everybody's nerves are all keyed up for fear of what may happen."

O'Hara struck a match on the fluted end of his torch and, cupping his hands against the slow wind, lit a cigarette. For a few moments he was silent, while they listened to the flow and heave of the tide. "No, I don't s'pose it's just the right place for a girl like you," he assented at last with a sigh. "Winter'll be coming along in a couple o' months, and you'll want to be somewhere near the white lights instead of bein' buried alive out here. But lemme tell you something, girly: You don't need to be afraid of that house. Nothing's goin' to happen in it."

"Something did happen," the girl reminded him quickly. "How about that night six weeks ago when somebody shot at Mr. Garrabrant through the library window? Missed him by half an inch and got away without even being seen."

"Things are different now, Minnie.

The boss wasn't so well protected then. Now he's got two watchmen on the job, me all night and Jim Weller all day. And, besides, he's got the place strung all over with burglar alarms. After the lights are out nobody could budge a door or a window without settin' one of 'em off. He's even got the wires strung under the hall rugs and the stair carpet. If anybody started prowlin' round inside it wouldn't be half a minute before a gong that's louder than a boiler factory would be tellin' the whole neighborhood about it. A million dollars' worth of diamonds would be safe in that house, even if all the crooks in New York knew about 'em."

"I don't believe it's Mrs. Garrabrant's diamonds that all this trouble's about," said the girl, as she and the watchman started to stroll slowly toward the house. "She hasn't got so many. They're not worth making all this fuss about anyhow, and——"

Her words broke off into a startled gasp. O'Hara had come to a sudden halt, and his flashlight was probing the darkness. "Listen, Minnie!" he whispered.

"What are you trying to do?" his companion protested under her breath. "Give me heart disease?"

O'Hara, clutching her arm, was busy sweeping his beam of light into the deep recesses of a path of flowering shrubbery. "Guess I imagined it," he said after a moment, "but I sure thought I saw something movin' in there. It just goes to show how a guy's nerves can get strung up on a job like this. But just look in there. See what fine hidin' places there are round here for a crook."

"Come on, O'Hara," the girl pleaded nervously. "I don't want you to get shot when I'm with you. Folks would say I did it. Anyhow I'd have to go to a police station or a court, and they'd put my picture in the papers. I never did look my best in a photograph."

"It's easy to figure how that bird who shot at Mr. Garrabrant managed to make his get-away," the watchman observed, as he turned off his light and moved on beside the girl. "There's too many hidin' places round here altogether—too many shrubs and hedges and thickets; and back of the garage there's that stretch of woods running clear up over the hill. What was that you was sayin' about the diamonds, Minnie?"

"I said Mrs. Garrabrant didn't have many diamonds. I've seen all she's got."

"How do you know they're all she's got?"

"Because if she had any more she'd be wearing 'em. She's that kind. If she had a diamond necklace you'd see it all right. She'd be wearing it in the daytime. She wants to make as big a splurge as she can. She and her husband are these new-rich kind. But all the same she's all right. I got nothing against her, even though she is kind of close and businesslike and nags about the food bills. She'll go and spend a thousand on clothes and then kick because the help's eating too many eggs. Kind of a funny combination, for usually her kind don't fuss much about the house expenses. But, O'Hara, if it isn't the diamonds, what is it that's given Garrabrant such a scare? Who's trying to get him, and why? It's got me dizzy trying to puzzle it out."

O'Hara shook his head. "You can search me," he returned. "I dunno no more about it than you do. He's a New York broker. P'raps he's bucketed somebody's roll, and the sucker's out to get even."

Far off on the hillside road behind the house the streaming lights of a swiftly moving car broke through the blackness of the night.

"They're coming!" exclaimed the girl.

O'Hara pulled out his watch and flashed his torch over it. "Just after ten," he observed. "Their train was due

quarter of an hour ago. That's their car all right. I guess I better be lookin' like I was on the job."

Leaving him the girl ran toward the house, slipped around to a rear door, and in the kitchen found the other maid and the cook. The cook, a chunky, gray-haired woman with a broad, florid face, looked up from her rocking-chair with a question on her lips. "Say, Minnie," she demanded, "what's this I hear you been tellin' Dora about quittin'?"

"That's right, Maggie. I am going to quit when my month's up. I don't want to be stuck out here by the seashore all winter."

It took the cook several seconds to digest thoroughly this bit of information. "Well," she sighed after carefully pondering the matter, "I guess I better be huntin' a job myself. I don't like the notion of workin' where somebody's gunnin' for the boss. I been feelin' nervous and fidgety ever since that night the bullet came through the winder. I like murders in the movies, but I got no hankerin' to be mixed up with one. What you goin' to do, Dora?" she asked sharply.

The dark, sharp-featured, sullen girl to whom she turned with the question gave a little disdainful sniff. "I'm not so scary as you two are," she answered. "This job suits me all right."

Minnie stepped into the pantry. "They'll be here in a minute," she called back and passed on into the dining room. Here the windows were open, and from somewhere near by on the road from the village she heard the faint purring of a motor. Peering through the fly screens she could see the lights of the car, which was turning from the main thoroughfare into the private driveway. It was at that moment that a sharp report startled her. She imagined somebody had fired a gun, and a glimpse of O'Hara, running across the lawn and down the drive toward the spot where the car had been brought to a quick stop,

convinced her that another attack had been made upon Mr. Garrabrant. But after a few seconds the car proceeded toward the house, and it seemed less likely that anything very serious could have happened. Moving quickly into the wide hall she swung the front door open, just as the machine, a big touring model, glided softly up to the foot of the steps. She saw then what had happened. It had been only a blow-out. One of the rear tires had gone flat. The incident was out of her mind in a moment, for, not being a seeress, she could have not the faintest suspicion of how significant it was going to be in the chain of circumstances that were about to develop.

A moment later the Garrabrants entered the house, closely followed by Jantzen, the chauffeur, who was heavily burdened with traveling bags. Garrabrant had been away for a week on a business trip, and his wife had accompanied him. He looked tired. His broad shoulders dropped a little, and there were dark rings under his heavy, sullen eyes. He was a big, square-jawed, smooth-shaven man of middle age and in a coarse fashion rather handsome. His thick, dark hair was turning gray. He was perhaps ten years older than his wife, a tall, flaxen-haired woman whose cheerful expression contrasted sharply with that of her husband, who looked morose, peevish, and worried. In fact the housemaid could not recall a time when she had seen him looking otherwise. The girl had always been a little afraid of him, his eyes were so harsh, his manner so repellant, his thin-lipped, cruel mouth so coldly contemptuous.

"Glad to be home again, Minnie," Mrs. Garrabrant murmured pleasantly, as the girl helped her to slip out of her summer touring coat. "Hot in Chicago, and I never did like the place. I was sorry I went. Get some tea for us? I'm starved. Bring it into the library."

"Yes'm." The girl stole silently off toward the kitchen.

Jantzen was disappearing up the stairs with the bags, and Mrs. Garrabrant followed him. "The trunks ought to be here in the morning," she called after him. "The expressman at the station will bring them over."

Presently the chauffeur, empty-handed now, appeared again in the downstairs hall. Garrabrant was there standing beside a table poring over a pile of mail. He looked up from the letters with a nervous start, as the man passed him.

"Hey, Jantzen!"

At the sharp summons the chauffeur halted abruptly. "Yes, sir."

"Have those watchmen been sticking close to their jobs?"

"Yes, sir." The chauffeur, a black-haired, sallow-faced, slender young man, was habitually taciturn, and information had to be drawn from him by slow degrees. It was not in his nature to offer a word more than was demanded.

"Everything been going all right?"

"Yes, sir."

"Any strangers been prowling round here?"

"Not so far as I know, sir."

Garrabrant gave a grunt. The brevity of the man's replies seemed to annoy him. With a shrug of his heavy shoulders he turned to his mail, and Jantzen went out to the car.

Two more bags remained to be carried in, and the chauffeur was back with them in a moment. As the man again passed through the hall, Garrabrant, who had not left the table where the mail lay, muttered an oath. In his hand was a small white card which evidently he had discovered hidden under the letters. Jantzen stopped, stared at him, and passed on to the stairs. Halfway up he looked back. The master of the house, still clutching the card, was glaring at the tiny scrap of paper with a look that was unmistakable in its sig-

nificance. His face had gone white. Something had suddenly shaken his nerves badly. The chauffeur realized that at a glance. So did Minnie, the maid, who at that moment was flitting through the hall on her way to the library with the tea tray.

CHAPTER II.

SCRAPS OF PAPER.

IT was not until his wife came down the stairs that Garrabrant glanced up from the card.

"Why, what's the matter with you?" she exclaimed, startled by the expression of his face. Her husband stared at her stupidly. He did not seem to realize that she had spoken to him.

"Lee, what on earth has come over you?" she demanded again. Aren't you feeling well?"

"Eh? Oh, yes—yes. I'm all right. Don't worry." Garrabrant was like a man coming out of a trance. Brushing past his wife he stepped into the library, passing in the doorway the maid, who was on her way back to the kitchen. Perplexed and a little alarmed by the curious change in his appearance and manner, his wife followed close behind him, intent on subjecting him to further examination. She watched him slump heavily down into a big chair beside the low table where the maid had left the tray.

"You certainly don't look all right," Mrs. Garrabrant declared, standing formidably in front of him and puckering up her forehead. "I've a good mind to call the doctor."

"You won't do anything of the sort. There's nothing the matter with me."

For a moment she studied his face silently. Her experience with his irritable moods was sufficient to make her realize the futility of argument. With a sigh of resignation she seated herself beside the tray. "Perhaps some tea will brace you up," she suggested.

"Make it strong." He took the cup she offered him and gulped down its contents hurriedly. Then with heavy, brooding eyes he watched her, as she sipped her tea and nibbled cakes.

"Lee, I'm getting tired of being kept in the dark about everything," she complained after a long silence. "Concerning your affairs you've been just about as talkative as a clam. What's been the trouble? What have you been afraid of and guarded yourself against so carefully? You know more than you've told me, I'm sure. But I——" She held out her open palms in a gesture of helplessness. "Why, I know absolutely nothing. And now to-night something else has developed to alarm you. Merely looking at you tells me that much."

Garrabrant gave a grunt of irritation. "Now, Cora," he protested querulously, "I've told you before that if I want to keep my worries to myself, that's my business. Somebody with a gun has been trying to get me—and darned near did get me. You know that much well enough, and that's enough for you to know."

His hand still held the card, and after a moment it was absorbing his attention again, as if it held some uncanny attraction.

"What is that?" his wife asked, staring at the bit of paper.

The maid returned softly into the room at that moment to take away the tea things.

"What's what?" he growled.

"That card. You've been glaring at it as if it had bewitched you."

"Oh—that," he mumbled absently. Abruptly he turned to the maid. "Anybody called while we've been away?" he asked sharply.

"No, sir; nobody."

"How do you know? Have you been on the job all the time?"

"Almost. And after I saw you pick up that card to-night I asked Dora and the cook if anybody had been here.

After a long, searching look at the girl Garrabrant tore the card twice across, crumpled the pieces in his fist, and tossed them into the cold ashes of the fireplace.

The girl went out with the tray. Garrabrant sat absorbed in his reflections. The silence seemed to get on his wife's nerves. With a long sigh she left her chair and stepped to a console phonograph which stood in an alcove. She slipped a record on the wheel and pushed the electric button. Softly through the room rang the melodious chimes that introduce the languorous strains of "Three O'clock In The Morning."

The next moment Garrabrant was on his feet, his face contorted with sudden anger. "Shut that darned thing off!" he cried. "I can't stand that tune." He turned furiously towards his wife.

"Why, what's the matter with it?" his wife protested. "It's all right. That's the new waltz. Everybody's playing it. That's 'Three O'clock In The Morning.'"

"I know what it is," he shouted, "and I don't want to hear it. I won't have it played in this house."

He moved quickly to the phonograph, pulled off the record, dashed it against a corner of the mahogany case, and shattered it to pieces. "There! That's done for!" he cried with a look of relief. "I can stand any tune but that, Cora. Anything but that." Again he sank into his chair and buried his face in his hands. "Three o'clock in the morning!" he mumbled. "Three o'clock in the morning! My God!"

"Lee, your nerves are in a bad way," his wife warned him, as she stared into his now uncovered face with wide, troubled eyes. "I've never seen you like this before."

"I know they're in a bad way," he admitted savagely. "Leave me alone. Go to bed."

Her face flushed, and she bit her lip,

as if to check an outburst of impassioned words. Moving to the door she turned for a parting glance at him before going up stairs.

As Mrs. Garrabrant entered her bedroom, Dora, the dark, sharp-featured maid who had been unpacking her mistress's bags, was moving softly about engaged in putting the last of the things in their proper places. It was a corner room in the rear of the house. Adjoining it was Garrabrant's bedroom, which overlooked the sea. The door between the two rooms was now closed.

"I didn't touch Mr. Garrabrant's things," said the maid. "He never wants anybody to unpack for him."

"Yes, I know," Mrs. Garrabrant returned. "He doesn't like being waited on, or to have anybody fussing with his things. You know, Dora, a good many men are like that."

"Yes'm. I suppose so."

"Dora, are you sure nobody called while you were away?"

"Yes'm, I'm certain. Nobody could have called without me seeing 'em, or Minnie."

Mrs. Garrabrant glanced at the girl with a perplexed frown. "Then how could a calling card have been left on the hall table?" she persisted.

The girl shook her head. "Minnie told me about that, ma'am, and I can't puzzle it out at all. One watchman or the other has been around here all the time, and they'd keep a close eye on anybody that came here. It doesn't seem possible that that card could have been left while you were away."

Her work finished at last, the girl left the room, and Mrs. Garrabrant, throwing open a window, stood staring out into the night. A dark figure moved slowly across the lawn. She told herself it must be O'Hara, the night watchman. Indeed it could be nobody else, unless the chauffeur, Jantzen, was in his room, for there was a light in his window over the garage.

"'Three O'clock In The Morning!'" the woman muttered. "Now I wonder how that tune could have aroused him to such a fury. It seems as if it must have reminded him of something that worried him. Oh, well, I give it up."

Before her husband came upstairs she was in bed, but she was too worried and restless to sleep.

Downstairs in the kitchen Minnie was sitting alone, glancing lazily over the pages of a magazine, but giving little thought to what she saw there. Dora and the cook had gone to their rooms, but this girl was in no hurry to go to bed herself. Her curiosity had been aroused, and womanlike she meant to do her best to satisfy it.

Garrabrant as a rule kept late hours, and it was almost midnight when the girl heard him moving about, making sure that doors and windows were fastened and setting the burglar alarms. He always attended to that matter himself. Noiselessly she stole into the hallway outside the kitchen door and stood there listening until she heard him going upstairs. Then she hurried into the library, taking pains on the way to avoid the alarms, for she knew where they lay under the rugs. Kneeling before the fireplace into which Garrabrant had thrown the three crumpled pieces of the card, she picked them out of the ashes and hastened back with them to the kitchen. There she flattened them out carefully and pieced them together.

"For goodness' sake, what——"

With a bewildered stare she studied more closely the result of her efforts. The card was not engraved, and there was nothing on it but the curious inscription written in ink: "Ali Baba."

CHAPTER III.

A CRY IN THE NIGHT.

AT one o'clock that night a fog began to drift in from the sea. It shrouded lawns and shrubbery and finally the house in an almost impen-

ettable veil. O'Hara, the watchman, had been prowling about with an eye to the lighted windows. He had watched them turn dark, one by one. At midnight the windows of the kitchen, of Garrabrant's bedroom, and of the chauffeur's room over the garage had still shone brightly. Then the kitchen had gone black; next Jantzen's room. For a short time a light had burned in Minnie's room, but, as the fog began to gather around the house, Garrabrant's light was the only one that remained. It gave the bored watchman something to do to note the retiring hours of the different members of the household. It was hard work killing time all night long. Even watching the lights go out helped to break the monotony. At last Garrabrant's light went out and for another half hour the watchman prowled about in intent meditation.

"A late bird the boss is," he mused. "He's always the last one up. Sits up worryin', I guess. I s'pose if somebody was gunnin' for me I'd worry, too. But I can't make out why he wants to keep me on this job. Seems like just waste of money. With all them burglar alarms nobody could get into that house without wakin' the dead."

He flashed his torch into the fog, but its light failed to penetrate very far. "Gee!" he muttered. "Somebody could be hidin' behind every bush, and I'd never find 'em—not on a night like this. This is a lonely, creepy job. I don't like it. Not a sound."

Yet one sound came to his ears distinctly, the ceaseless, mournful beating of the sea upon the sand. The air hung lifeless. Not a twig, nor a leaf stirred.

"Not a sound but the water," he muttered. "A fine old time to——"

The words caught in his throat. Out of the fog and piercing the black night came a cry that sent an icy chill through him, a cry for help. And then he heard his own name called frantically.

For an instant the watchman stood

rigid. "It's the boss!" he exclaimed, suddenly springing into action. Rushing to the house he brought up under Garrabrant's windows.

At that moment a shot rang out from above. Then silence, broken after an instant by a woman's screams. With his torch flaring to guide him through the fog, O'Hara ran around to the front door. It did not occur to him until he had come to it that of course it was locked, and that so were the other doors, as well as the ground-floor windows.

Turning to the casement window that was nearest, he smashed a pane of glass with the butt of his revolver, shoved his hand through the hole, and turned the catch. As he swung the window open, a gong went off with a deafening clatter. He crept inside. As he came to the hall another gong joined in the frantic uproar. He sprang up the stairs four steps at a jump, his revolver in one hand, his torch in the other.

In the upper hall he came upon Mrs. Garrabrant. She was screaming hysterically, but the sound of her voice was almost drowned by the clamor of the gongs.

"My husband's been killed!" she exclaimed. "He's there in his room, and I can't get in."

O'Hara threw himself against Garrabrant's door. It was locked.

"Where's the other door?" he demanded.

"In my room," she wailed, "but it's locked, too."

"Locked?" roared the watchman, bewildered. "Then he's shot himself."

"No, no!" she screamed. "He's been murdered! He cried for help, and I heard the voice of somebody else in there with him."

Again he threw himself against the door. He was a heavy, powerful man, but it held firm against his weight. Running into Mrs. Garrabrant's room he tried the door there, but it was locked, as she had told him. Glancing about, his

gaze fell on a round, heavy little stand, which supported a flowering shrub. After lifting the plant to the floor, he picked up the stand, swung it powerfully, and dashed it with terrific force against a panel of the door. The panel split, and another blow made an opening large enough for him to put his arm through. Reaching in he found the key on the other side of the lock and managed to turn it. He swung the door wide. The room was dark, and he pressed the button of his torch.

Barely a second later, realizing suddenly that Mrs. Garrabrant was close behind him, he snapped the light off, but in the instant of illumination he had seen Garrabrant lying motionless on the floor in his pajamas.

"You better not come in here, Mrs. Garrabrant," the watchman protested. "This is no job for a woman."

"No—no!" she cried. "You're not going to keep me out!"

O'Hara did not wait to argue with her. Again he flashed his torch and, stepping to the switch, snapped on the current. A mere glance convinced him that Garrabrant was dead. Kneeling beside the body, which lay flat on its back, with ghastly face staring with half-closed glazed eyes at the ceiling, he found that a bullet had entered the man's chest just above the heart.

"Plain case of suicide," he told himself; "and yet——"

Why had Garrabrant called for help? For the moment he had forgotten that fact. He looked around for the weapon. A look of utter bewilderment came into his round face. For a few seconds he glared around the room. "Why, where's the gun?" he muttered. "There ain't any."

He looked up into the white, frightened face of Mrs. Garrabrant. She was quiet now. The sight of her dead husband seemed to have stunned and stupefied her. From somewhere in the house, rising above the nerve-wracking

din of the gongs, came the cries of alarmed servants. The watchman rose to his feet and, running to the door leading into the hall, unlocked it and pulled it open. As he looked out, he caught a glimpse of the two maids running toward him.

"Shut off those gongs!" he roared, and, slamming the door, he turned again to Mrs. Garrabrant.

"There ain't any gun," he shouted in her ear. "Where is it?" The look he gave her was full of sudden suspicion.

Mrs. Garrabrant shook her head helplessly. Suddenly the bellowing of the gongs ceased. The abrupt silence was appalling. Through chattering teeth she gave a long, shivering gasp, as if, relieved from the tension of the hideous noise, her nerves were giving way.

"Where's the gun?" O'Hara demanded again.

"I don't know," she sobbed. "I told you he didn't kill himself."

With a shrug of his shoulders the watchman turned away from her. He began to observe the room more closely. It was a big room, rather barely furnished. Besides the two doors leading out from it, another door, now hanging half open, betrayed a clothes closet. He stepped to this closet and inspected the inside. A good many clothes were hanging against the walls, and he poked them with his torch, with the idea that they might offer concealment for an intruder. On the floor were rows of shoes, a small suit case, and an English kit bag.

Coming out of the closet he again studied the room. The clothes of the bed were thrown back, and the pillow and the sheet over the mattress showed the impression of Garrabrant's heavy body. Evidently he had left the bed and taken at least half a dozen steps across the room before he fell. The windows, one in the rear wall of the house and the other diagonally opposite, were both wide open. That was natural enough, for Garrabrant always

slept with all the fresh air he could get. The watchman stepped first to one window, then to the other. They were both protected by fly screens, which were closed tightly and fitted so snugly that he found difficulty in budging them.

"Did your husband always keep his door locked?" O'Hara asked at last.

"Always," Mrs. Garrabrant answered.

"And the door into your room, too?"

She shook her head. "I'm not so sure of that. I know he did sometimes."

O'Hara slowly scratched his head, as he pondered the problem. "You heard him call for help?" he asked, his face brightening, as he discovered this neglected line of inquiry.

"Yes," Mrs. Garrabrant sobbed weakly, as she covered her face with her hands. "Some sound—I don't know what—woke me, and just then I heard that one shout, 'Help!' And then I heard a laugh." She shivered. "Oh, that dreadful laugh!"

"A laugh!" O'Hara cried skeptically.

"Yes; and then some words were spoken that I couldn't understand. It was a shrill sort of a voice. I know it wasn't my husband's."

"A man's voice?"

"Perhaps. And it might have been a woman's."

"And then what?"

"And then," she gasped, "the shot."

"No sound after that?"

"No, nothing."

O'Hara stepped into the hall. At the top of the stairs he found the two maids and Maggie, the cook.

"Where's Jantzen?" he asked roughly.

"He's downstairs," Dora answered.

"I just let him in through the kitchen."

"Well, go and find him. I want him to watch that room while I go and telephone."

As Dora hurried down the stairs, the watchman started to question the cook and Minnie.

"What did you girls hear?" he demanded. "Anything besides the shot?"

"That was all I heard," declared Minnie, "except those horrible gongs."

O'Hara turned to the cook. She was a phlegmatic, stupid-looking woman, but there was something pleasing about her frank, honest face. "I guess it was the shot that woke me up," she said. "And then, just before those gongs went off, I heard Dora's door slam. Her room's right next to mine."

"You heard Dora's door slam!" O'Hara exclaimed. "What did she slam it for? Was she running out?"

"No; she hadn't come out of her room then. It was the wind, I guess."

"There wasn't any wind," the watchman reminded her solemnly.

CHAPTER IV.

THE MAN WITH THE THUMB.

WITH the dawn the fog lifted, but the sky remained threatening. It was not until a little before noon that the sun came peeping out, apparently to take a look at the big, fat, ungainly figure of a man who was pressing the bell at the front door of the Garrabrant house. On his huge limbs his gray suit hung loosely and baggily, and his square derby hat, a trifle shabby, came down to his ears. His smooth-shaven face was round and puffy. Indeed everything about him seemed to be round, even his little, babylike nose and his pale-blue, innocent, staring eyes. He carried a large, flapping, cotton umbrella. Apparently he was by no means young. His hair, cropped so close that the bumps on the back of his head and the furrows between the folds of flesh at the nap of his neck were particularly noticeable, was white and contrasted oddly with his pink cheeks and his jovial, youthful expression. As he lifted his hat and pulled out a big handkerchief to wipe the perspiration from his brow, he disclosed the fact that the top of his head was bald.

As the door opened, he pushed his

way inside and stood staring, his cherub mouth half open, at the maid who confronted him.

"What's your name, girlie?" he demanded.

The girl flushed angrily. She seemed about to resent the uncalled-for familiarity of the stranger. But, in spite of his shabby old umbrella and his careless clothes, there was something about the man that was impressive and compelling. Perhaps it was merely his size and his air of easy self-assurance.

"Dora Walsh, sir," she answered sullenly after a moment of hesitation.

The caller tapped a huge thumb against the girl's arm, and his protruding eyes suddenly turned ominously serious. "Dora, where were you when Garrabrant was killed?" he asked, the great thumb still pressing her arm.

With a gasp the girl shrank back. "I was in my room," she muttered.

The man's eyes seemed to open even wider with mild surprise. His mouth dropped open again. There was no mistaking his frank skepticism.

"Yes, sir," she stammered in confusion. "I was just going into my room."

"What!" Once more his mouth gaped open, and the big umbrella, slipping from a hand that seemed paralyzed with amazement, fell to the floor with a resounding clatter. Apparently the sudden crash of it upset the girl's nerves completely.

"I mean," she gasped, "I mean—I was just coming out of my room. Oh, I don't know what I mean. Who are you, anyway?"

She gave a little nervous start, as she caught sight of another man coming down the stairs, a gaunt, stoop-shouldered man, with a heavy, sandy mustache and sharp eye. She knew that he was Mat Slocum, the county detective, who had been in the house all the morning.

"That will be all, Dora, just now,"

said the caller. With a look of relief the girl hurried away.

"Well, if it ain't 'Uncle' Johnnie Henderson," exclaimed Slocum. "Haven't seen you for ten years, but I knew you when you dropped that umbrella. Same old trick, hey? I remember the way you used to work it when we were on that case together ten years ago. Gosh, how that old cotton umbrella did get some of those witnesses' goats."

The big man began to laugh. It was a laugh that brought dimples into his cheeks and shook his whole body. "I've worn out a whole lot of umbrellas, Mat," he admitted with a final chuckle.

"Yeah, I guess so." Slocum gave a perplexed frown. "What brings you down here?" he asked. "The widow didn't send for you, did she?"

Henderson shook his head. "It was the brother, Frank, that put me on the job, Mat," he answered. "He and Lee made up the firm of Garrabrant & Garrabrant, brokers, down in Broad Street. Brother Frank blew into my office bright and early this a. m. and gave me all the lurid details, so far as he knew 'em. Said he wanted a real, life-size detective on the job, and he'd heard of my rep. Said he was afraid that down here in the country some hick sleuth would ball things up, and the case would fizzle out."

Slocum winced. "Well, I may be a hick detective," he admitted, "but I dunno as I'm so bad at that. I've known some of the boys that stand high in Centre Street who've been derved glad to ask my advice sometimes."

Uncle Johnnie Henderson indulged in another chuckle. "Don't get peevish, Mat," he said. "You're all right. I know what kind of a head you've got on your shoulders. Now let's get down to business. Spill all the news to me."

Slocum led the way into the empty library and closed the door. "Uncle Johnnie, this case has sure got my goat," he declared ruefully, as he slumped into

a chair. "From the way it frames up now it ain't possible. Somebody's lying, of course. P'raps they're all lying. But I've got a notion that as a real, genuine, high-grade artist of a liar the widow would be hard to beat."

Henderson gave a little grunt. Standing with his broad back to the fireplace, he had been scrutinizing the room. Now it seemed to have lost interest for him. Sinking heavily into a big, leather-covered armchair he turned his round, pale-blue eyes on Slocum. "I know somebody who's lying, too," he said softly. "That girl who let me in just now. But she's no artist at it. But go on with the story. I didn't mean to interrupt."

Slocum's information, excepting a few details seemingly insignificant, was not new to Henderson, who had obtained practically all of it from Frank Garrabrant. The surviving member of the brokerage firm had been having a long talk with O'Hara over the long-distance wire.

"You can see for yourself it must have been an inside job," Slocum concluded. "With all those burglar alarms nobody could have got into the house."

"Not through the bedroom windows?"

"I don't see it. There's no way of getting up either to the wife's windows or Garrabrant's. And if somebody had got up to 'em, he couldn't have pried those fly screens loose without making too much noise. And then how could he have got out? If he'd jumped from a window he'd have left deep footprints in the turf. There aren't any marks outside there at all. I'd say the wife did it and work along that line, but that leaves another big puzzle. How in blazes did she get out, leaving the doors locked on the inside. The only way I can figure it is that she must have discovered some new trick about locks."

"Oh, well," said Uncle Johnnie, with a long, luxurious yawn, "things sometimes look darned queer till you get to

the bottom of 'em, but there's always an answer. I never found the answer yet by sittin' round, guessin' and lookin' puzzled. To find it get busy."

"Gosh, Johnnie!" Slocum protested. "Don't think I haven't been working. I've been as busy as if I'd sat on a hornets' nest."

"Sure, I know." Henderson rose and stretched himself. "I guess now I'll look over the exhibits myself. I'll take dear little Dora as Exhibit A. I sort of took a fancy to that little lady's style of conversation."

Slocum gave a long look at the bland face of the head of Henderson & Faber's Detective Agency. He had firm faith in Uncle Johnnie. He knew that those round, innocent, staring eyes were wiser than they looked. He knew that this shiftless-looking, fat giant had earned an enviable reputation as a solver of mysteries. But he himself felt that the girl was of good deal less importance as a subject of investigation from Mrs. Garrabrant. He considered the explanation the girl had given him of the slamming of her door as fairly plausible, and, even if she were lying about it, he didn't believe it possible that she could have had anything to do with Garrabrant's death. She had told him that she had heard the cry for help and had ran out into the hall. Then came the shot, and, thoroughly frightened and panic-stricken, she had rushed back into her room and slammed the door behind her. When she heard the cook and Minnie in the hall she found courage to go out and join them. In describing what he had learned during the morning he had already repeated the girl's story to Henderson, and Uncle Johnnie hadn't given any indication then that he doubted it. However he knew there was never any telling what was on Uncle Johnnie's mind.

The two men went out into the hall and discovered there the other maid, Minnie. The girl looked embarrassed,

and Slocum had an idea that she had had her ear to the keyhole. However it was of no consequence, he decided. He was sure she couldn't have heard anything of importance, for they had been speaking in fairly low tones.

Minnie was turning away when she felt the pressure of Uncle Johnnie's big, flat thumb against her arm. With a little shiver of alarm she stared into his popping eyes.

"What were you doing when Garra-brant was killed?" he demanded solemnly.

"Me? I—I was asleep," she gasped, frightened and disconcerted by the round searching eyes and the big tapping thumb.

Her inquisitor was still clutching his old umbrella, and Slocum wondered whether he meant to drop it to emphasize his apparent astonishment. But this time Uncle Johnnie did no more than to drop his mouth open to indicate how incredible the girl's assertion seemed, and how much it had startled him.

"Asleep!" he exclaimed. The protruding eyes seemed to be reading all the secrets of her heart, and the pressure of the big thumb rasped all the nerves in her body.

"I was, I tell you!" she cried wildly.

The hand clutching the umbrella loosened a bit, then took a firmer hold, as if Uncle Johnnie had decided that the girl wasn't of enough importance to drop it. Clacking his tongue against his lower lip, he stared at her with eyes stern with suspicion. "Think it over, girl—think it over," he said, dropping his voice to a whisper. "We'll have a little talk by and by. Go and send Dora here."

The girl flew to the kitchen, where she found Dora talking with the cook. "Oh, that awful, goggle-eyed man!" she exclaimed breathlessly. "That man with the thumb! He had me scared stiff. Go on, Dora. It's your turn. He wants to see you."

Dora gave a cry of dismay. "I won't go!" she exclaimed. But after a moment she changed her mind and reluctantly dragged herself out to meet the man she dreaded.

Slocum had disappeared somehow, and in the hall the fat man with the umbrella was standing alone waiting for her.

"Come in here, Dora," he said, as she appeared. He turned into the library and, as the girl entered, closed the door. Slowly he moved to a window and stood there looking out over the sunlit lawn. Several seconds passed. The girl could hear herself breathing, and she could feel her heart beating violently against her ribs. He turned and moved ponderously toward her. Timidly she glanced at him and shrank back, as she discovered the protruding eyes solemnly studying her face. The silence became oppressive. Suddenly the tapping of the big thumb against her arm sent her nerves on edge.

"I want the truth, Dora," said Henderson, his voice scarcely more than a whisper.

"I—I've been telling the truth," she gasped. "I told Mr. Slocum all that I know."

For another long moment he stood staring at her silently. He could see her wilt under his steady gaze.

"Dora," he said at last, "I've spent some thirty-odd years tryin' to drag the truth from folks, and I've learned to read 'em like a book. Your story don't ring true. You weren't too scared to go into the hall alone when you heard Garra-brant calling for help, so I'd be willing to bet that a shot clear at the other end of the house didn't scare you enough to run back and slam the door. You'd have stuck to your bed in the first place, if you'd been as scary as that. Now s'pose I happened to know that somebody saw you sneakin' through the hall, and——"

"Saw me!" the girl cried, her face

turning white. "You don't mean that somebody was there!"

Henderson did not answer, but his owl eyes seemed to say that he knew far more than he had admitted. The girl sank weakly into a chair and buried her face in her hands. She began to sob softly. She did not dare look again at the wide, pale-blue eyes that seemed to be reading all her secrets.

"Now you're going to tell me really what happened, Dora," said Henderson, after a long silence.

"I—I went downstairs," she gasped. Then her voice was stifled by sobs.

"Yes?" said Henderson softly. "Which stairs?"

"The front stairs. It was before I heard that awful cry from Mr. Garrabrant's room. It was while I was coming back, trying to make sure I wouldn't step on a burglar-alarm wire, that I heard him. And then I—I didn't want to be caught there, and I ran to my room and slammed the door."

"Well, why did you go downstairs?"

"Why—to—to get something I'd left in the kitchen," she stammered.

Henderson's mouth dropped open, as he stared at her in bewildered incredulity. "That you left in the kitchen?" he cried. "Then why did you go around by the front stairs when the back stairs were so much nearer to your room?"

She shook her head. "I don't know," she answered with a sob.

"What was it you left in the kitchen?"

"Why—I—I can't remember," she gasped, her wits deserting her, as she felt the tap of the big thumb.

Again a long silence. "You're not telling the truth," came Henderson's low voice at last. "I want the truth."

The girl's sobs became hysterical. "I won't tell any more!" she screamed, jumping up. "I won't! I can't! Leave me alone! Oh, leave me alone!"

Henderson watched her for a moment, as she stood trembling before him, her fists clenched, her eyes snapping,

her lips set tightly in grim determination.

"All right," he said at last. "You can go. But think it over, Dora. You're going to tell! You're going to tell!"

CHAPTER V.

THE WRONG BAG.

HALF an hour later Jantzen, the chauffeur, as he stepped out of the garage, caught sight of the fat man with the umbrella moving heavily toward him. From the women in the kitchen the chauffeur had already heard a detailed description of the awe-inspiring stranger, and only a few minutes had passed since Minnie had told him that "old pop eyes," as she called him, was upstairs talking with Mrs. Garrabrant.

"Well," began Uncle Johnnie genially, stepping up to the chauffeur and pressing a compelling thumb against a button of the man's vest, "let's hear what you've got to say for yourself. I've been thinking a whole lot about you." The pale-blue eyes were searching the young man's thin, sallow face. "Where were you when Garrabrant was killed?"

"In my room at the garage," Jantzen returned promptly.

Uncle Johnnie's eyes looked incredulous. "Yes?" he questioned in a tone of mild surprise. "That sounds interesting—very." His tone was sharply sarcastic now. "But never mind. Let's hear the rest of your story."

Jantzen's dark eyes studied the detective for a moment. "There isn't much to tell," he said. "When I heard the shot I jumped out of bed, got into my coat and breeches, and ran over to the house. Couldn't get in. Everything locked up tight. When I got to the back door the gongs began going off, but I didn't think of the front window being smashed, and that I might get in that way. I ran round the house and didn't notice it. Then I banged on the rear door till one of the girls came and let me in."

Uncle Johnnie gave a bored sigh. "Yes, I know all that, he said. "Slocum told me. And then O'Hara got you to go up to Garrabrant's room to watch there while he went to telephone. And then some time after daylight you got the car out and drove down to the station. Why?"

"To get Mr. Garrabrant's kit bag. I'd picked up somebody else's from the station platform by mistake last night, when he and Mrs. Garrabrant arrived. I didn't notice that I'd got the wrong bag till after I'd gone up to the boss' room after he was dead. The clothes-closet door was open, and, while I was waiting there for O'Hara, I happened to notice that the bag had somebody else's initials on it. It was the same kind of a bag as the boss', and I couldn't see any difference till I'd studied it for a while. Then I remembered that there'd been two kit bags close together on the station platform, and I knew I'd picked up the wrong one. Later on in the morning I told Mrs. Garrabrant about it. I told her I'd taken the kit bag from the room and out to the garage, and that I was going to take it back to the station and get the right one. At the station I found Mr. Garrabrant's bag in the baggage room, and then a chauffeur came along who said he was looking for his boss' bag. I made him describe it, and then I went to the car, pulled out the bag I'd brought from the house, and gave it to him."

Uncle Johnnie looked more incredulous than ever, as with bulging eyes and mouth hanging open he stared at the man. "Gave it to him?" he whispered. "You didn't ask who he was?"

Jantzen shifted uneasily. "No, sir. I didn't think it was necessary."

For a full minute Uncle Johnnie glared at the man without a word. "Well, I'll be darned!" he exclaimed at last, and the umbrella fell to the ground with a crash.

The chauffeur gave a slight start.

His dark eyes looked anxious. "I don't see anything so queer about that," he protested.

"Whose initials were on that other bag?" Uncle Johnnie roared suddenly. He had picked up the umbrella and was pointing it ominously at the chauffeur's nose.

Jantzen's lips quivered nervously. "Why—I don't know," he answered with a troubled glance at Henderson. "I didn't think it would be necessary to remember that."

"Well, that's a strange story," sighed Uncle Johnnie after a long pause. He stepped into the garage. Jantzen, following him, was turning over in his mind the account he had given of the bags and wondered why it had struck the fat man as so peculiar. It didn't seem to him that there was anything so unusual about it. But Jantzen didn't know Uncle Johnnie's peculiarities and his capacity for showing astonishment. Slocum, if he had been with them, would have attached small importance to Henderson's display of amazement. He knew Henderson's theatrical ways. Slocum had been convinced long ago that Uncle Johnnie should have gone on the stage.

On entering the garage the big touring car caught Henderson's attention. He looked it over carefully. "Nice car," he muttered. He looked inside and felt of the cushions. In fact there did not seem to be anything about it that escaped his sharp observation.

"And then where did you go?" Henderson asked.

"I came back to the house," said Jantzen.

"Yes? Went straight to the station and came straight back?"

"That's right."

"Been anywhere else to-day?"

"No, sir. Been hanging round here ever since I got back from the station."

"Let's see," mused Uncle Johnnie, clacking his tongue. "I hear you had a

tire blow out when you were out in front of the house last night coming back from the station. Changed it, I see. Rear tire, wasn't it?"

"Yes, sir. It was worn out. It had been on a long time."

"Pretty good cord tires you use," Uncle Johnnie observed. "A rear one ought to be good for seven thousand miles easy. How long did that one go?"

"I don't know," the chauffeur answered with a frown of perplexity. "I suppose Mrs. Garrabrant keeps a record of 'em. Most folks do if they're businesslike, and she looks after the car expenses. She's kind of tight with the money, and I guess Mr. Garrabrant wasn't so careful."

Henderson turned away and for a few moments stood in the doorway staring out to the sea. At last he gave a long sigh and waddled away toward the house. Slowly he made his way around to the front door, his puffy face looking even a little more solemn and owlsh than usual. Arriving at the door he pushed the bell button. It was Minnie who answered the summons.

"Tell Mrs. Garrabrant I want to see her again," said Henderson, scarcely glancing at the girl.

He stepped into the hall, where he paced to and fro, with his hands clasped behind his back, until the maid returning from upstairs, followed by Mrs. Garrabrant.

"Mrs. Garrabrant," he began abruptly, "you keep a record of your tires, don't you?"

"Yes, of course I do," she answered. Her blue eyes, swollen with weeping, turned to Henderson bewildered.

"Got a record of that tire that blew out last night? If you have, I'd like to see it."

"If you'll wait à moment I'll get the book for you," she returned amiably, "though I can't understand why you should want it."

She glanced at Henderson questioningly, but he offered no explanation, and after a moment she turned and went upstairs. Presently she was back with an account book in her hand. Opening it she ran over the pages until she came to the one she wanted.

"Here it is," she said, pointing to a line on the page she held out to him.

"H'm!" muttered Henderson, clacking his tongue. His face brightened. "It's only the last figure I want. Nine thousand two eleven. That was a pretty good tire. There's nothing the matter with that record for the rear. Thanks. That's all I want. Sorry to trouble you."

"Don't you want to make a note of the number?" she asked.

"No, I can remember it. I'm pretty good at remembering."

He went out chuckling, and, as he came to the gravel path, the chuckle grew to a laugh. At that moment Mat Slocum happened along. "Why so happy, Johnnie?" he inquired.

"Oh, I've got something that sort of cheers me up, Mat. Remember that tire blow-out last night? Well, I've got a sneakin' suspicion that that little accident's put me on the right track. I've got something to chew on now, Mat."

CHAPTER VI.

A MATTER OF MILES.

IT was not until almost noon the next day that Slocum saw Henderson again. Uncle Johnnie had been away from the Garrabrant house ever since his mysterious remark about the blow-out, and he was in a silent, thoughtful mood when he met Slocum. The latter was coming down the front steps of the house after a talk with Mrs. Garrabrant, and he was now about to return to the village.

"What you got to tell me?" Slocum asked.

Henderson shook his head solemnly. "Wait a while, Mat. I want to see how my hunch is going to work out.

"Who d'ye suspect, Johnnie?"

"Everybody. I always do."

Slocum smiled and passed on to the little runabout that was waiting for him beside the car that had brought Henderson. As he drove away, he looked back and saw his fat friend ambling toward the garage. The county detective began to do a lot of thinking.

"I wonder what the old boy is up to," he muttered. "That tire blow-out got him started on something, and now he's headed for the garage. A tire blow-out! How in thunder can a tire blow-out have anything to do with Garrabrant's death? It's beyond me. I give it up."

In the garage Uncle Johnnie found Jantzen. The chauffeur was looking worried. He was still wondering what the inquisitive fat man had found so peculiar in his account of his trip to the station about the bags.

Uncle Johnnie looked at him long and earnestly. Jantzen began to show signs of nervousness. Every time he looked at the fat man those round, bulging, suspicious eyes were fastened upon him. But not a word was spoken. At last silence became too much for the chauffeur to bear, and he made some trivial remark about the weather.

"Yes," said Uncle Johnnie, "nice day." Again he relapsed into silence. But not once did he take his gaze from Jantzen's face.

At last the fat visitor became a trifle less sphinxlike. "I notice you haven't been bothering about your trip mileage," he remarked. "Guess you haven't turned it back for some days. It was 77 yesterday, and that's where it is now. But you didn't do seventy-seven miles yesterday. You did only eleven, if you only went to the station and back. It's five and a half miles to the station. Unless you did sixty-six miles more than you say you did, you must have begun

the day with your trip mileage showing that much. You couldn't have gone seventy-seven miles yesterday. You weren't gone long enough. You were away from the house less than an hour. You couldn't have gone half that far."

Jantzen looked puzzled. "I told you I went only to the station," he said. "As for that trip mileage, I never bothered about that unless I took the boss or his wife for a long ride."

"Well, that don't matter much now," said Henderson. "But I've been sort of interested in your season mileage. That's considerably more reliable than trip mileage, because there's never any telling whether the trip mileage was turned back at the start, or not. Only the chauffeur knows about that. I see your season mileage is nine thousand two hundred and twenty-nine. The same yesterday. When the tire blew out it was nine thousand two hundred and eleven."

Jantzen gave a start, and his sallow face seemed to turn a shade more colorless. He was watching Henderson closely.

Suddenly Uncle Johnnie's staring eyes grew stern. "Where did you go yesterday, Jantzen, besides to the station?" he roared. "Since the blowout you went eighteen miles instead of eleven. How about that other seven miles? That meter don't lie. It's got you checked up right to the mile."

Jantzen could not conceal his confusion. "I don't know," he returned after several seconds of silence. His voice was trembling. "I can't remember going anywhere else."

"Yes, mebbe you've forgotten," said Uncle Johnnie charitably. "So, if you have, you'll thank me for reminding you, I know. You see, I've always been interested in calculatin' with figures, and, not having much else to do, I amused myself dopin' out how you'd put in that other seven miles. There's only one road between here and the station,

so you must have gone on somewhere three and a half miles from the station and three and a half miles back to it. So I draws a semicircle on the road map with a radius three and a half miles from the station, and I go browsing along that semicircle. The only thing on the whole derved line that I could find worth mentionin' was a little bit of a pond, and that was three and a half miles to the dot. And in the muddy bank of the pond were some footprints that looked sort of like they might have been yours, Jantzen. I'm not saying they were, but they might have been. There was an old, flat-bottomed rowboat on the bank, and so, just to amuse myself some more, I got a feller to go out and poke 'round in that muddy water, with a hook on the end of a pole. The water wasn't very deep, and the pond wasn't very big, and it wasn't long before he fished up somethin'. It was a kit bag, Jantzen. Kind of funny, wasn't it?"

The chauffeur looked as if somebody had given him a blow in the face. He stepped back, breathing hard and with twitching lips.

"Well, I got to be movin' along," said Uncle Johnnie, turning to the open doorway. From the path outside he looked back. "A kit bag, Jantzen," he called with a chuckle. "Think of it."

Three hours later Uncle Johnnie was in the library talking with Mrs. Garra-brant. Glancing through the window the woman saw her chauffeur passing in her touring car. "Why, where's he going?" she exclaimed.

Uncle Johnnie stepped to the window and watched the car whirling away up the hill. It was not until it disappeared in a cloud of dust that he turned to Mrs. Garra-brant. "I'm pretty fair as a guesser, ma'am," he chuckled, "and my guess is that he's goin' to the station." He pulled out his watch. "There's a train due in twelve and a half minutes. He'll just about make it."

A few moments later Uncle Johnnie strolled leisurely out to his own car. He was going to the village, but he seemed to be in no particular hurry. He drove to the station and was getting out of his car when he caught sight of Slocum coming toward him across the street.

"Where you headed for?" Slocum inquired, as he drew closer.

"New York," was the curt reply.

"Anything new?" the county detective persisted.

Henderson considered the question a moment. "Well, yes, Mat," he admitted at last. "Get in the car, and we'll talk. I'm in no hurry. I stopped here for a time-table, but I don't want a train. I'm goin' to drive back to the city."

"Well, what's on your mind?" asked Slocum impatiently.

Henderson pointed to an empty touring car at the other end of the platform. "Recognize that machine, Mat?"

"It looks like Garra-brant's."

"It is Garra-brant's. Jantzen drove over here in it. You'd better keep an eye on the car and get somebody to drive it back to the house, for I've got a pretty good notion that Jantzen's on that train that pulled out of here fifteen minutes ago."

Slocum gave a puzzled frown. "You're sure got me guessin', uncle," he exclaimed. "Go ahead and explain."

Leisurely Henderson proceeded to divulge what he had discovered at the pond, and of how he had startled the chauffeur with his disclosures. "I knew I'd scare him into jumpin' out of here," he concluded. "So, long before I sprung the news on him, I telephoned my partner, Gus Faber, and got him to send out a man to trail him in case he skipped. Glad he's gone. I want to find out who he is, and where he goes to."

"It looks like you were in a fair way to find out somethin'," Slocum commented. "You think he killed Garra-brant?"

"I dunno, Mat. But he knows who killed him, anyhow."

"I can't figure how it could have been done," the county detective mused dismally, "or what that bag's got to do with it. How about that girl, Dora? Could she have been mixed up in it?"

Uncle Johnnie chuckled. "I had another talk with her, Mat," he said, "and she broke down and spilled the beans, just as I knew she would sooner or later. She sneaked down the stairs that night to pull the pieces of card out of the fireplace. She'd heard Minnie talkin' about 'em, and she got mighty curious. She didn't know Minnie'd picked 'em out already. It was that card that Minnie told us about, Mat—Ali Baba's card."

CHAPTER VII.

COUNTRY AIR.

ON the edge of the little village of Springvale, Massachusetts, stood an old, white farmhouse that had looked down from its hillside perch upon peaceful valley and winding river since the days when Washington was president. It was built by a man named Grover, and possession of it had passed down through half a dozen generations of the Grover family. It now belonged to young Steve Grover's uncle, Reuben, and young Steve would inherit it some day if he should outlive the old man. But, although the uncle was seventy, and the nephew less than thirty, the village folk were inclined to think that Steve's chances of outliving the owner of the property were rather slim. Steve's father had died of consumption, and now the young man was showing signs of the disease himself. He might last two or three years, or he might go to pieces pretty fast. He had been away working somewhere, and he had been back at the old home only a day. The few neighbors who had seen him had remarked that he looked pretty bad.

The morning after Steve's return a huge fat man, with bulging, pale-blue eyes, got out of a train at the village station. His mouth dropped open, as a curious sight caught his attention. Crossing the street behind the station and coming toward him was a man no larger than a circus dwarf. His head was too big for his body, his legs too short for it, and he walked slowly, with queer little jerky steps.

"Who's that?" asked the fat man of the first person he met. "A circus in town?"

"No," was the answer. "That's Mark Tanner. He was born and brought up here."

The fat man's curiosity was not satisfied. He wanted to know all about Mark Tanner, and the more he learned the more interested he seemed to become. His thirst for information was like a dry sponge sopping up water. Not content with what the man told him on the station platform, he began rambling about the village, picking up chance acquaintances and questioning them not only about Tanner himself, but about Tanner's family and Tanner's friends. At the rate he was going it seemed likely that before the day was over he would know as much about the villagers as did the oldest inhabitant.

Three or four hours after he stepped off the train he appeared, breathless and perspiring from the walk up the hill, in front of the old Grover farmhouse. A slender young man, with a thin, sallow face, was standing at the door.

"Hello, Jantzen!" chuckled the fat man.

The sallow-faced young man had been watching the fat stranger coming up the hill. He knew who he was. "Hello, Henderson!" he returned listlessly.

"So you're Steve Grover," said the fat man, mopping his round face with a big handkerchief. "I got you, Steve. Yes, and I guess I know all about Ali Baba now, too."

The young man gave a slight start. "About Ali Baba!" he exclaimed. "You've found out all that?"

Uncle Johnnie Henderson laughed. "I've made what I think is a fairly good guess now of how Garrabrant was killed, Steve," he said. "But you can help me considerable with details. How about it? Ready to talk?"

The young man gave a listless nod. "I don't care much about what happens to me," he said. "I don't believe I've got so very long to live. My lungs are all shot to pieces. But I wish you hadn't got on the trail of Ali Baba."

"H'm!" grunted Henderson. "Anybody inside?"

"No; I'm alone here just now. We can talk all we want to. Nobody will hear us."

Henderson sat down on the doorstep with a weary sigh, and after a moment Grover seated himself beside him. "Know much about Garrabrant?" the young man asked.

"I've been learnin' considerable about him," Henderson returned. "I guess he was a kind of a shady character. He only began to get respectable about a year ago."

Grover's dark eyes flashed angrily. "He never was respectable!" he exclaimed. "He was a rotten cur. That's what he was."

Uncle Johnnie's face grew serious. "I know, Steve," he said almost tenderly. "You was in love with the girl, wasn't you? Knew her ever since she was a kid. Thought you was goin' to marry her some time. Never engaged to her, but just took it for granted. And then she went to New York on a visit and met Garrabrant. A pretty thing she was, I've heard—pretty and innocent. And somehow he found out about the forty thousand dollars her old man had left her. It was easy for a man like Garrabrant to win a simple little country girl like her. He married her, and he had his hands on the forty

thousand in no time. Poor kid! How did he get rid of her, Steve?"

The young man gave a long, half-stifled sob and covered his face with his hands. "He—he killed her!" he cried.

"What!"

It was several moments before Grover got control of himself. "No, it wasn't just what you'd call murder," he explained at last. "But he meant to kill her all right. He took her down to the Mexican desert, and the life he led her there must have been terrible. He was a wife beater—Garrabrant was. She didn't last long down there with the kind of treatment he gave her, to say nothing of the bad water and the bad food and the heat. It was a place called Querobabi, down in Sonora—the devil's own hole. After she'd been down there a while she managed to send a letter to her brother."

"Mark Tanner?" Uncle Johnnie asked.

"There was only one line in that letter, and it looked as if it had been written by a pretty feeble hand. All it said was: 'Come and take me home.' And she'd signed her name to it—just 'Ruth.' So Mark went down to Querobabi. There was only a few dirty little Mexican shacks down there, and he found her in one of 'em. She was so weak she could hardly speak. But Mark soon found out what had been going on. Garrabrant abused her and beaten her and starved her, and he'd let her lie there day after day, suffering from the heat and the flies. The night Mark got there she died, at three o'clock in the morning. And just after she'd passed away Garrabrant came and found Mark beside her body. Mark would have killed him right there if he'd had a gun. He told Garrabrant he'd kill him some time."

"And at last he did kill him," said Henderson. "And you helped him do it."

"I'm not sorry, Henderson. It was right to kill him. A life for a life—that's what the Bible says. He'd murdered her, though the law wouldn't call it that. He'd killed her too slowly for the law to get at him. Mark and me just figured we'd have to take justice in our own hands."

Uncle Johnnie sat staring off into the valley. Now and then he clacked his tongue fiercely, but for a long time he did not speak. "How was it done, Steve?" he asked at last.

"You see, he'd got all of Ruth's money, and he was tired of her. And he'd met another woman that he wanted to marry, the woman who was his wife when he was killed. That second wife of his don't know yet that he was married to Ruth. He never told her, because he was married to Ruth when he was making love to the other one. Even his brother didn't know. He was kind of ashamed of Ruth, I guess, and he was ashamed of having a brother-in-law who was a midget."

"How did you do it, Steve?" Henderson asked again.

"It took us months to find out where Garrabrant was, and when we found him living down there by the shore I got a job as his chauffeur. He didn't know me—never had seen me. He must have made a lot of enemies, because, after Mark had shot at him through the window, he didn't know just who was gunning for him. But a man like him always injures a lot of people in one way or another, and he made up his mind it was time to protect himself. Mark wasn't satisfied to have Garrabrant in the dark about who was after him. He wanted him to know that he was going to be killed for what he had done to Ruth. So he got me to leave his card in the hall. Nobody but Garrabrant would know what that card meant. Ali Baba is the name Ruth gave Mark when he was a kid, because he had a little donkey and reminded her of Ali

Baba and the donkey in the 'Arabian Nights.' He traveled with a circus for a few months and used the name then. Garrabrant knew the name Ruth called her brother by, and when he found that card with Ali Baba written on it, he knew Mark was after him. I guess you can figure out for yourself what happened afterward."

Uncle Johnnie nodded owlishly. "You put Ali Baba in the kit bag you brought that night from the station and that you left with Garrabrant in his room."

"Yes; that was the way of it. Mark's only twenty-seven inches high—two inches taller than Tom Thumb was—and he could get into an English kit bag easy. The bag measured twenty-nine inches, and it wasn't so very big, either. It had a lock on the inside, a snap lock, and just under the hinge was a hole big enough to let in plenty of air. Mark waited till Garrabrant was asleep, and then he crept out. Garrabrant heard him and let out a yell, and Mark laughed at him. He told him to remember what he'd done to Ruth. And then, after he'd killed him, he got back into the bag and snapped the lock. That's the whole story."

Uncle Johnnie remained silent. Again he was staring out over the sunlit valley with a curious, dreamy expression in his bulging eyes. "Poor little kid!" he muttered at last. "Too bad she didn't marry you, Steve."

The young man choked back a sob. "Don't speak of her," she pleaded. "Come along, Henderson. I'm ready to go with you."

Uncle Johnnie did not move. Apparently he was absorbed in thought and had not heard Grover's last words. At last he got up and stretched himself. "This is a mighty bad climate for a man with your lungs, Steve," he said.

Slowly Uncle Johnnie went ambling off down the slope of the hill. "I'm a

bum detective, I am," he muttered. "But I'm gettin' kind of old and sentimental, and I guess it's 'bout time I was doin' one good turn for somebody. Gosh! I wonder what I'm goin' to tell Mat Slocum."

The pale-blue eyes stared off across the sun-bathed fields to pine-covered hills. The lazy breeze wafted to him the fragrance of new-mown hay. Above

him a flock of crows swung through the air with flapping wings and raucous cries.

"Gee! This country air feels good!" he exclaimed. "Wish I had a farm."

He had been a country boy himself, and his thoughts began to wander back across the years to the days when he lived in an old white house on a hillside like Steve Grover's.



BOGUS-MONEY GANG ARRESTED IN NEW YORK

FEDERAL agents recently arrested twenty-eight ringleaders of a counterfeiting gang in New York. The arrest of these men has brought to light details of what is now considered the most amazing counterfeiting plot attempted in modern times. The organization, which extends throughout this country and to many European lands, is said to involve a gang of ten thousand persons.

According to a special operative of the treasury department, Joseph A. Palma, more than \$1,000,000 of false money has been put in circulation in the last year. The recent arrests bring the number of detained prisoners of the gang to sixty-four. The trail crosses that of international bootleggers and rum smugglers. The organization, however, is so vast that even the officials of the treasury department are not certain where it will end. In the recent arrests they gathered an enormous amount of counterfeiting paraphernalia and \$100,000 in false money.

The authorities believe that New York City has been the center of the gang, and the arrests followed the information sent to Washington that a \$10,000 purchase of the money was to be made. Three of the master minds of the gang are thought to be among the captured men. The prisoners are all in a battered condition, for a battle ensued before they were captured.

The money was seized in a restaurant on Broome Street, conducted by John de Rosa. This was one of the central manufacturing plants of the gang, but false clues were so laid that on the surface the trail led elsewhere. Wholesalers of the money passed up and down the street, negotiating the sale of the false notes, while six or seven armed guards of the gang protected them. There were nine gangs working on the distribution system, but none of them knew of the existence of the others.

Another plant for the manufacture of the money was located on Cornelia Street, in the cellar of a wine store. Prices on the counterfeit money varied from fifty cents on the dollar down to seventeen cents. The big fellows got the lower prices because of the greater quantity of money they sold, while the little fellows, the passers, paid as much as fifty cents. This they turned over to agents or wholesalers.

Palma is convinced that the sixty-four persons now in custody make up the master minds of the gigantic organization. By means of bootleggers and dope peddlers, whom they aided by furnishing imitation labels, they were able to float their false money in Cuba and the Bahamas, as well as Europe.

Brethren of the Shadows

by John Hunter

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS

A NOTORIOUS band of jewel thieves, calling themselves the Brethren of the Shadows, have made a pact to disband and divide their spoils. One half of the loot is distributed in even shares at once. The other half is left with Hector Cunningham, one of the Brethren, under a compact whereby it is to be kept intact until all but one of the band are dead, the survivor then to have the entire remaining spoils. At the time of the opening of the story the Brethren have been disbanded for ten years, their last exploit involving the murder of McElvey, the banker, and another man, Carlotti. There are only three survivors, Hector Cunningham, his friend Bartholomew, and Len Sarson, who has been wandering abroad for eight years and puts in an appearance at Wickham, where Cunningham has his home, on the day following Cunningham's receipt of a warning message from the Gray Wolf, a criminal who is in the habit of warning his victims before robbing them.

Tess Cunningham, Hector Cunningham's niece, surprises the Gray Wolf in the act of robbing her uncle's safe, and the theft is frustrated, the Wolf taking to flight and escaping. A few days later, Tess, after saying good night to her sweetheart, Dick Langley, goes to her uncle's room and finds him dead, a knife in his back, the jewels gone, and the Gray Wolf's emblem, a small metal image of a cowering wolf, lying close at hand.

Shortly after, Tess discovers that a friend of Dick's, named Cartwright, carries several of these little images with him, and the suspicion that Cartwright is the Gray Wolf appears strong against him. She says nothing, however, and agrees to his suggestion that his friend Nell Remington come to live with her.

Meanwhile Mr. Bartholomew, now one of the two surviving members of the Brethren, is visited at his Chicago residence by the other survivor, Sarson, who insists that Bartholomew has killed Hector Cunningham and stolen the jewels. Sarson, however, is pacified, and, following his departure, Bartholomew is visited by the Gray Wolf, who also demands the missing jewels of him. Their conversation is interrupted by the entrance of Bartholomew's secretary, and the Wolf takes to flight.

CHAPTER X.

MR. BARTHOLOMEW MOVES.

N the day after the Gray Wolf had paid him his sensational visit, Mr. Bartholomew sat down and devoted half the morning to solid, cool thought.

His first realization was one of serious omission. He did not know where to find Sarson, and at that moment, he conceived, Sarson might be of considerable value to him. He had been in such haste to get rid of the big, ungainly fellow the previous evening that he had not troubled to ask the man where he might communicate with him, so that the only thing he now could do was to wait until Sarson took it into his head to call or write.

This being so, Mr. Bartholomew swept the other surviving member of the Brethren of the Shadows definitely out of his reckoning and viewed the whole situation from his own point of view. It was himself and the Gray Wolf. He pondered on the Gray Wolf and tried to place his identity, but soon realized the absurdity of that. With this, he conceived that he had come to a blank wall, until he remembered his interview with the cowed marauder.

The Gray Wolf had had just such an inquiry to prosecute when he set out to search for the Brethren, and he had carried that inquiry to a successful conclusion, not by endeavoring to leap straight across the gap of anonymity which separated him from the Brethren, but by bridging that gap little by little.

All his crimes, everything he had done, had been in the way of collecting information.

Mr. Bartholomew decided to take a leaf out of his book, and do the same. He ceased to consider the Gray Wolf particularly, and went through the affair point by point. The message the Gray Wolf had left at Cunningham's house, there was nothing in that. The apparently miraculous way in which the Wolf had entered and left the house, this caused Mr. Bartholomew some deep thought, and he finally gave it up, as so many people had already given it up, in despair. The coming of Sarson—Mr. Bartholomew's agile brain leaped to life at the name. That girl—Tess Cunningham—had said that Dick Langley had known Sarson when they met him. Yet Dick Langley was a fool, an empty-headed, tennis-playing youth. Why should he know Sarson? How could he possibly know Sarson? Mr. Bartholomew pursued the point with eager impatience.

There had been Dick Langley's dinner-time conversation on the night Hector Cunningham was killed. He had mentioned his great friendship for McElvey, saying that he had been to school with the banker's son. And McElvey had been the central figure of one of the Brethren's last crimes. They had murdered him. Only Mr. Bartholomew knew who had murdered him, and even then he could see McElvey's face accusing him through the dream cloud of pistol smoke which swirled before his eyes.

McElvey—ten years ago! Ten years was the period during which the Gray Wolf had hunted the Brethren. Mr. Bartholomew began to get excited. He had a sudden inspiration, and set to work to find out all he could about the McElvey's, father and son.

In an hour the information was to his hand, and he picked out the item he immediately required. It was the name of

the college McElvey's son had been attending when his father was shot.

Mr. Bartholomew sent a prepaid telegram to the president of that college. The telegram was long, and it inquired if the pedagogue could give him any information regarding the whereabouts of a lad—now a man—named Richard Langley, who had been at the school during the year McElvey was shot, and who had been specially friendly with young McElvey.

Late that day a reply came to Mr. Bartholomew. There had been no boy named Richard Langley in the college during the whole of young McElvey's attendance there.

CHAPTER XI.

TESS SITS IN.

FOR some moment after her discovery of the gray wolves in Cartwright's wallet, Tess crouched in the car bottom, striving to steady her shocked senses and decide on a course of action. At last she realized the obvious, and replaced the little packages in the wallet. She was just about to gather up the other things that had dropped from Cartwright's pocket, when she paused.

Already she had decided that she did not wish Cartwright to know she had discovered what his wallet contained, and she thought that if she left the things on the floor of the car, exactly as they had fallen, with the wallet apparently intact, and the metal models inside it, he would conclude she knew nothing.

She accordingly straightened herself and began to attend to him, and as she did so, another car came round the bend of the road and immediately pulled up. In it were a man and a woman, and to them Tess quickly explained what had happened. The woman stayed with Tess and assisted her to render first aid to Cartwright, while the man went to report the matter to the police.

In a little while Cartwright recovered

consciousness. He opened his eyes, stared stupidly up at Tess, and then looked at the woman who was helping her.

"Tess," he murmured; and then: "Did we hit it?"

"Yes." The girl wondered if her expression was perfectly normal, and whether there were suspicion and accusation lurking in her eyes. "It was a car—coming round the corner. You remember, Mr. Cartwright? It's knocked our front wheel off. You banged your head on the windshield." She paused and found she could not resist the temptation to launch an experimental shaft. "This lady's husband has gone for the police."

While she had been speaking, Cartwright had largely recovered his wits, and as she added this last item of information, he said to her companion:

"It's awfully good of you. I hope it hasn't meant upsetting your journey."

"Not at all. As a matter of fact——"

At that moment Cartwright saw his possessions on the floor of the car.

Tess, balked in her attempt to embarrass him by mentioning the police, had been waiting for this, and had watched him carefully.

"Hello!" he said. "I've been spilling things." He stooped, as though to pick up the various objects, and then straightened himself, his hand to his head.

"Can't be done!" he gasped. "Feel as though my head's bursting. Could I trouble you, Miss Cunningham?"

The second string to the girl's bow had broken. Cartwright was as unruffled and nonchalant as though those sinister little models were unknown to him. Tess stooped and picked up his belongings and handed them to him. His eyes met hers with the action, and he smiled wanly.

"Fine way to take you home," he murmured. "Nearly getting you killed. I haven't asked you yet how you came off. I hope you're all right."

"I wasn't hurt a bit, thanks. Just slid to the bottom of the car."

Tess spoke with some abruptness, for she felt that never again would she be able to display the old friendliness toward Cartwright. That he was deceiving her and Dick and everybody, was patent; and that he was a master of the art of deception was equally plain. He could not possibly be the innocent, frank young fellow they had all imagined.

The police arrived soon afterward and asked a lot of questions, took road measurements and a photograph of the smashed car, and then intimated that they were taking Cartwright back to Morganburg for medical examination.

He assented cheerfully and turned to Tess. "I don't know how you'll get on, Miss Cunningham. I'm sorry you've been stranded. Perhaps the sergeant would take you back to Morganburg with him."

The man with the other car intervened, and finding that Tess wished to get to Wickham, offered to run her directly there. She accepted his offer gratefully, and while Cartwright waited for the police to complete their measuring processes, she climbed into the friendly stranger's car.

They were just about to start, when Cartwright said to her: "By the way, Miss Cunningham. Bashing my head hasn't made me forget our little suggestion regarding Miss Remington. I'll make an opportunity of calling on her." His eyes lightened. "Look here! Suppose you write and tell her about this. She might come over to see you, and then you could fix it."

"I will," agreed Tess, as the car started forward.

The last she saw of Cartwright he was standing between the sergeant and a policeman, and she told herself that it was as it should be, except that the handcuffs were absent.

On reaching home, Tess thought over the whole matter, and found many

points of query, to which her eyes had previously been blind. Curiously enough, her first thought was not of Cartwright, but of Dick, and it brought with it a sense of despair, for she suddenly remembered that Dick had recognized Sarson that day while they were walking in from Morganburg, and for the first time appreciated to the full the significance of that recognition.

Sarson seemed to be one of the knots in the tangle of mystery which centered around her uncle's death, and Dick had known him without Sarson knowing Dick; so that, before her uncle was murdered, Dick knew some secret or other connected with his life, or some past incident in it, which was hidden from her. Yet he had always pretended to know nothing of her uncle, or of his affairs. He had even denied that he recognized Sarson. With a sinking heart, Tess admitted to herself that he was deceiving her, and that all his apparent frankness was a cloak.

At this, she almost abandoned thinking, afraid to go on, urged to accept the situation blindly, and to pretend to herself that she still trusted Dick fully; but she found it impossible, and in a vain endeavor to forget Dick's duplicity, switched her thoughts to Cartwright. It was strange that both Dick and Cartwright should be practicing a deception, she thought; for, despite her determination, Dick crept into the argument. They were both young and jolly and frank, the kind of nice men she could meet at any tennis party or dance; and they both were hiding something from the world, something which events must make her consider to be grim and perhaps sinister.

And then, into her thoughts, crept the Gray Wolf. She shuddered and strove desperately to banish the thing which suggested itself to her, but at last had to admit it to the scope of her considerations. Already she more than suspected Cartwright. Suppose Dick were his confederate? Suppose the Gray Wolf's

amazing exploits were rendered possible because there were two of them? Feverishly she built a foundation of logical argument for the deduction.

The Gray Wolf, so the world said, always went hooded completely, so that any tall, active man could pass for him. On the night that mysterious message had been left in her uncle's safe, it was obvious that the house had not been broken into; but Dick and Cartwright were already in the place. They had no need to break in! And Dick had been the first to reach the room when she cried out, although—and she remembered it now—his bedroom was farthest from her uncle's study!

Then there was the car, all muddled, when she was sure it had been left clean. Dick had tried to pass that off. With this doubt came others, which she considered almost unworthy. He had borrowed the car the following morning, saying he wished to go to Chicago, and had not seemed overpleased when she volunteered to run to the station at Morganburg with him. Suppose he had intended taking the car to Morganburg so that it could be cleaned, and thus remove any chance of suspicion being aroused? Such attention to detail would be worthy of the Gray Wolf. She recoiled at that. She could never, under any circumstances, think of Dick as the Gray Wolf, for the Gray Wolf had murdered her uncle!

She tried to blot the criminal from her mind, and pondered on the other unknown quantity in the case—Mr. Bartholomew. He could not be the Gray Wolf, for the notorious malefactor was an active man, while Mr. Bartholomew had reached the age of obesity. It seemed that, despite her instinctive dislike of him, Mr. Bartholomew was the only really honest man of them all. He had been good to her in the matter of her uncle's death. She might do worse than make a confidant and friend of him.

With that she remembered Nell Remington, and Cartwright's suggestion that she would ask Nell to stay with her. She was filled with righteous indignation as she contemplated it. Cartwright was carrying on a flirtation with Nell, knowing her to be a nice girl, and knowing what he himself was, and had the hardihood to suggest that she would become an accessory to his schemes by getting Nell to her house, so that he could more easily visit her, without having her father to contend with.

She would not do it, and yet it might be wise. She was desperately in need of a friend, especially one of her own age and sex, in whom she could confide and to whom she could turn for advice and support, if necessary. Nell, she felt sure, would prove such a friend. Also, by having Nell stay with her, she could watch Cartwright's progress, and if she considered he was making any impression on Nell, it might be advisable to tell the girl exactly what he might be and might have done. In view of what she had just discovered, in fact, it might be safeguarding Nell to have her at the house instead of leaving her with her parents, who would accept Cartwright as an honorable young man.

After all this, Tess found herself faced by one question. What should she do?

She answered it immediately, and with some determination. She had learned too much and yet not enough. There was only one thing possible for her, and that was to go forward. She would, she decided, thrash out this matter of her uncle's murder and of the Gray Wolf, until she understood it completely. It was significant of her total incapacity for detective work that, apart from that passing consideration of him in connection with Dick's recognition, she should entirely omit Sarson from her calculations.

When she had her mind made up, she wrote two letters. One was to Nell Remington asking her to come and stay

with her, and the other was a special delivery to Mr. Bartholomew, saying she wished to see him, if he could make an appointment with her.

CHAPTER XII.

THE GRAY WOLF'S WARNING.

THAT evening, Tess was rung up on the telephone three times. The first call was from Dick Langley, saying that he was detained in Chicago for at least that night, and perhaps the following night, and asking her if she would feel quite secure with the old lady who was staying at the house.

"That's all right," said Tess. "I can get along for to-night, and to-morrow I'll have Nell Remington over. At least, I've written asking her to come."

"Who?" asked Dick, and there was a little sharpness in his voice which surprised Tess.

"Nell Remington. You remember——"

"Oh, yes. Of course. Right you are. Heard anything of friend Bartholomew?"

Tess wondered if Dick could appreciate over the telephone the coldness which, despite her efforts, would persist in creeping into her tone. "No; but I'm seeing him soon. I've written asking him to come down."

"Why, what's the matter?"

"Oh, nothing."

Dick paused; then: "Say, Tess. Is anything wrong? I mean——"

"Nothing. Good-by!"

Tess hung up the receiver. She felt she could not continue the conversation any longer without bursting into some accusation or reproach.

Her other two calls were from Nell Remington and Mr. Bartholomew. Nell would come the following day, and Mr. Bartholomew the day after. He regretted that business kept him in Chicago the next day; otherwise he would have come then. He did not con-

sider it necessary to mention that the business was connected with Dick Langley.

The next morning brought Nell Remington and a solitary letter. The letter was on Tess' breakfast table; its envelope was typed. She glanced at the postmark, Morganburg. Then she ripped it open. It contained a cheap, gilt-edged correspondence card, on which was typed very neatly:

It is not always wise to judge on circumstantial evidence. This applies equally to exculpation as well as condemnation. Bear it in mind when dealing with Mr. Bartholomew Bartholomew. WOLF.

Tess dropped the card to the table, and for a moment she trembled. It was as though the sinister figure was in the room with her, leaning over her shoulder, whispering to her. He knew she was going to confide in Mr. Bartholomew, and he was warning her against doing so. Or was it a trick? Did he fear Mr. Bartholomew, and was he trying to turn her from her purpose? How did he know her intention? Unless Dick——

She choked at the thought. Dick was the only man who could possibly know. Yet the warning was from Morganburg, and Dick was in Chicago. It was not until afterward that she realized that Mr. Bartholomew's correspondence might be watched.

An hour later, Nell Remington arrived, looking very pretty and smart. Tess greeted her warmly.

"I've arranged for us to share a room," she said, as she escorted Nell upstairs. "I'm dreadfully afraid of sleeping alone, so I've appropriated the room uncle always kept for married visitors. It's got two beds in it. I thought it would be better. Do you mind?"

"Not at all. It'll be fun. Where's Mr. Langley?"

"He's in Chicago. Went up yesterday. He won't be back to-night. At least, I

don't think he will. He told me not to expect him. So we shall be alone. Play billiards?"

"A bit." They had reached the room, and Nell was removing her hat and deftly putting her hair into shape. "Seen Jack Cartwright lately?"

"Oh!" Tess remembered. "You haven't heard, of course. He's hurt."

Nell's hat dropped from her hand, and she swung around like lightning, her face white as death. "What do you mean?" It hardly seemed like Nell speaking, so swift and hard was the utterance.

Tess answered a little confusedly. "He picked me up yesterday in his car. We had a smash after leaving Morganburg. His head was knocked about. He was taken off by the police for treatment. He had regained consciousness and seemed better. I don't think it was serious. I thought perhaps you might have known it. He was talking about you."

Nell's tenseness relaxed and she smiled. "How should I know of it?" With the return of calmness, Tess almost thought that her voice had altered. "I'm glad he wasn't hurt much. Nice boy!"

"Yes," agreed Tess vaguely; and told herself that Nell had fallen in love with Jack Cartwright.

Her heart drummed at the knowledge. It was unfair and cruel. Both she and Nell were in the same plight.

CHAPTER XIII.

NELL REMINGTON.

NELL and Tess spent the afternoon reading in the flower garden, and after dinner was over, Tess went to her own little study to write some letters relative to her uncle's estate, leaving Nell chatting to the old lady who was acting as chaperon. She was nearly three quarters of an hour writing and after she had finished, she sat for a while thinking.

Dick was evidently not returning to Wickham that night, and she wondered, with a shiver, whether the morning would show another deed of the Gray Wolf's done under cover of darkness. He was not returning. It gave road to a suggestion which she at first repulsed and then admitted.

Here was an opportunity to examine his personal effects and see if they afforded the slightest indication as to his position in the tangle. She tried to escape from the temptation, naming it dishonest and sneaking, but it persisted, and its arguments were subtly convincing.

Dick was deceiving her, tricking her. She should fight him with his own weapons. In fact, she was already doing so. By keeping silent regarding her suspicions, and by not boldly telling him everything and asking him to explain, she was matching duplicity with duplicity. Further, there was Nell, cruelly deceived by Cartwright, and undoubtedly more in love with him than was good for her peace of mind.

She could easily slip into his room now and run hurriedly through his effects. She need not pry into anything that was obviously innocent as far as connection with the matter of the Gray Wolf was concerned. The servants were all below stairs, and Nell was safely engaged with the old lady in the drawing-room. The house was silent, and any noise would warn her of the approach of an intruder. She cast all her scruples aside and took the plunge.

When she left the study she crept like a burglar on forbidden premises. Dick's room was in a little cul-de-sac branching off the main corridor of the upstairs story. In this cul-de-sac were only two rooms, a very small chamber used as a linen closet, and the room which served as Dick's bedroom.

Tess walked swiftly and carefully along the corridor toward her objective, her feet noiseless on the thick carpet,

her ears strained for the slightest sound. Then she came to an abrupt standstill.

From the direction of the little cul-de-sac had come the subdued sound of a door being carefully shut. There was a faint rustle of silk, and Nell Remington walked into the corridor, bent slightly forward, hurrying, alert. Tess could have cried out at sight of her. Nell, on seeing Tess, immediately relaxed.

"Hello, Tess," she said. "I was looking for you. Got mixed up with all these passages and went to the wrong room. Found myself in the linen cupboard. How long are you going to be? I want to find out how much billiards you've learned from Dick."

Tess steadied herself. Nell's manner was so easy and natural that it almost deceived her; certainly it put her on her mettle.

"I shan't be long," she said. "I've got to get a memorandum regarding some dividends from Uncle Hector's study. Come along with me. I hardly like going there alone."

Her facile acceptance of the other girl's explanation, and her lack of any inquiry regarding it, apparently satisfied Nell that she was not suspicious, so she immediately fell in beside her and chatted unconcernedly as they went toward Hector Cunningham's study.

Tess knew where to find some old financial papers, and she took them out and ran carefully through them, selecting one at last, and replacing the others. In all this she found matter for wonder, for she realized that she was displaying considerable ability and playing her part well.

She left Nell at the stairhead, saying: "I'll be down in about a quarter of an hour."

Nell ran downstairs, and Tess walked in the direction of her own room. When she was again alone, her imagination ran riot. Nell, the friend on whom she had depended, playing her false! For Nell had been acting, had been lying, when

she spoke of looking for her. That tense, alert expression was not the aspect of somebody searching for a friend in order to hurry her to a billiard match, but the strained look of a person keyed to a high pitch of nervous tension, watchful for interruption or danger.

It almost moved Tess to panic. She had a sudden conception that she stood alone; that all around her the people she knew were intriguing, walking in dark pathways, secretly fighting a secret fight unknown to her, Dick, Cartwright, Nell, those whom she had thought her staunchest friends. More than ever was she now determined to search Dick's room and she turned back toward it.

At the stair well she paused, and peeped cautiously over the balustrade. Nell had disappeared. She slipped into the little cul-de-sac. As she did so, she remembered that the housekeeper invariably kept the linen closet locked, and before entering Dick's room, she tried the door of this closet. It was fastened. So Nell had been surely lying when she said she had entered it. It was the door of Dick's room which had closed in that moment when Nell hurried out into the corridor.

Tess let herself into Dick's room. It was all very neat and orderly, for the maids had been busy, and had tidied up the disarray in which he had habitually left it during his sojourn in the house. His bag was standing on a chair by the wall, and all his clothes were hanging in the wardrobe.

Tess turned her attention to these first, working feverishly, turning out his pockets one by one, examining everything and replacing it before dealing with the next pocket. There were two suits and an overcoat, and they yielded nothing. In their pockets were the usual things that an ordinary man carries about with him. She turned to the bag, and told herself that if it were locked her mission was a failure.

Time was slipping by. She wondered

if she had exceeded the quarter of an hour she had told Nell Remington she would require before she came downstairs, and if, in that case, Nell would again come to look for her; and if she did, and found her there, after she herself had been in the room. Tess wondered what she would say, and what would happen.

She tried the fastenings of the bag, and found that it was not locked. It contained very few things; a spare set of underclothing, one or two clean shirts, a collar box, ties, and other articles of apparel. She lifted them all out carefully, taking pains not to crease the shirts, and noting in what order they had been placed in the bag; for if her dreadful suspicions were correct, Dick would have so arranged things that, if anything were disturbed, he would know that his bag had been searched.

Like the wardrobe, the bag revealed nothing, and Tess began to replace its contents. The last thing she put back was the circular collar box, and she was about to restore it to its place, when it occurred to her that it might be as well to open it. She unfastened the strap and lifted the lid. It contained half a dozen clean collars. The bottom of the box was covered by an old piece of folded newspaper.

Tess shut the lid and then suddenly opened it again. Why should Dick cover the bottom of his collar box with newspaper, and not the bottom of his bag? In fact, why should he cover either of them?

She picked out the collars, and then the newspaper. It was a sheet torn, apparently, from a file copy, for there were marks of clean cut holes in its jagged edge. The date of it was two years previous. She glanced at both sides of it. One side contained a number of editorials. The other was filled with chatty little paragraphs regarding current men and things, with photographs of some of the people concerned.

One of these paragraphs was headed "Romantic Echo of Grim Tragedy." It told how Christine Blair had married Jack Benson of the Eagle Detective Agency and referred to the famous operative's exploit in smashing the criminal organization with which her father's name had been coupled. It was illustrated by a photograph of Christine Blair.

Tess stared at the photographic reproduction and felt her senses reeling, for the pictured face was that of Nell Remington!

CHAPTER XIV.

AN EXPERIMENT.

TESS stood for a few moments, the old sheet of newspaper clutched tightly in her hands.

Nell Remington was either Christine Blair, or Christine Blair's double; and Christine Blair had become Mrs. Jack Benson, the wife of the detective who was hunting the Gray Wolf, and the only man on the side of law and order who had the least chance of catching that formidable criminal.

That being so, all Tess' fears regarding Nell's susceptibility where the blandishments of Cartwright were concerned were wasted. Christine Blair would never fall for Cartwright; and if she allowed Cartwright to make love to her, it was because she had an object in doing so.

Immediately, Tess thought of the little gray wolves she had found in Cartwright's pocket. Benson was hunting the Gray Wolf. His wife was allowing Cartwright to make love to her, and Cartwright carried the grim symbols of the Gray Wolf's identity! It fitted in like a puzzle. Cartwright was the Gray Wolf! Christine Blair, Mrs. Benson, Nell Remington, whatever she cared to call herself, was endeavoring to trap him.

With that, Tess remembered the fact

that this photograph had been in Dick's collar box. To argue that it was there accidentally would be absurd, she knew; so that Dick had some interest in endeavoring to identify Christine Blair.

It shattered Tess' theories once more. If Cartwright was the Gray Wolf, and Nell Remington was hunting him, who was Dick? And what was his connection with the occurrences of the past few weeks?

Tess felt her head whirling with the intricacies of the problem, and felt inclined to abandon it in despair. Then she realized that to do that would involve either accepting Dick with a doubt in reserve, or giving him up, too. She must go forward. But what move could she make next? This work of detecting was easier to read about than to do. There seemed no obvious move for her, no step she could take in the definite direction of a solution of the mystery.

She looked down at the news sheet, and an idea came to her. Dick would return to the house within the next twenty-four hours. Nell Remington would be staying on. Dick, with this photograph in his possession, must know Nell's real identity. Suppose, when he went to his bag, he found the page missing?

He would have to act then, and the burden of the initiative would have been shifted to his shoulders. All Tess would have to do would be to sit and watch. She folded the sheet quickly and concealed it in the bosom of her dress. Then she replaced the collar box and fastened the bag.

She did not go downstairs immediately, but returned to her room, looked around to make sure that nothing had been disturbed, and then proceeded to the drawing-room. She was feeling strangely poised and calm and watchful.

Nell and the old lady were wrestling over a game of checkers. Nell looked up as Tess entered, and smiled.

"Come on, slow coach!" she said. "I

went up to your room a few minutes ago, to look for you, and you weren't there."

Tess did not answer. She told herself that there was a challenge in Nell's eyes.

CHAPTER XV.

THE GRAY WOLF AT WORK.

ON the same evening that Nell Remington entered Dick Langley's room, and Tess made her astonishing discovery regarding the identity of her supposed friend, the Gray Wolf struck one of his lightning blows.

He had been dining at one of the big hotels with a man highly placed in the engineering profession, and had definitely turned down an offer from this gentleman to proceed to Brazil and superintend the laying down of a difficult section of transandean rack railroad.

They went to a musical revue after dinner, but found it dull and tiresome, despite its glitter and gorgeousness of scene and costume. They adjourned to a near-by café where they ordered ginger ale and supplemented that beverage by the more potent liquid which the Gray Wolf's entertainer carried in a silver flask.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Willerson," the Gray Wolf said, after the first high ball was partly consumed; "but I'm afraid I must adhere to my original decision and run away from you. It's been mighty good of you to take my refusal so kindly."

Charles Willerson smiled. "I haven't taken your refusal yet, son. I'm going to talk to you again. And look here, don't run away. Can't you telephone and postpone this appointment? I want to argue with you further over supper."

The Gray Wolf shook his head. "It is rather important," he said. "I couldn't put it off."

"A lady?" Willerson's eyes were twinkling.

The Gray Wolf nodded gravely. "Yes."

Willerson lifted his glass. "To her—although I've never met her."

The Gray Wolf drank. "That," he said soberly, "is the first time I've ever toasted the goddess of chance, and I'm realizing the omission."

He left Willerson wondering if the drink had affected him.

Instead of the usual evening overcoat, he had brought with him a dark-blue raincoat of the trench pattern, with a broad belt, and he donned this, turning up the collar and fastening it across his shirt front. From the pockets of this garment, he also produced a soft dark-gray felt hat and a pair of rubbers, which he put on over his patent leather shoes.

There was a slight drizzle of rain falling when he got out into the street, but he proceeded on foot, walking swiftly, without once looking back. It was this fact which enabled a man who had sat at a table near him in the café and who had occupied a seat behind him at the theater and who was now following him closely, to remain unobserved. For the first time in his history, a detective had got a line on the Gray Wolf; his pursuer was none other than Benson of the Eagle Detective Agency.

The Gray Wolf's destination was Mr. Bartholomew's house, and his objective the jewels which had been stolen from the safe of Hector Cunningham on the night the old man had met his death. The house stood on a corner, in a good residential neighborhood, facing a small park. Beside it ran a narrow darkened alleyway, used by tradesmen and servants to gain access to the rear of this and the adjoining houses.

The watcher saw the Gray Wolf walking past this opening. Then he vanished, as though into thin air. A lightning sidestep had taken him into the darkness. The detective drew back. He had no desire to interfere with any-

thing the cracksman did in connection with Mr. Bartholomew.

A few minutes after the Gray Wolf had disappeared, a taxi drew up outside Mr. Bartholomew's house and a tall, loose figure stepped from it. The watcher whistled softly to himself.

"The unknown quantity," he muttered.

The unknown quantity in question was Sarson, and he went at once into the house.

Meantime the Gray Wolf had run swiftly up the alleyway to the high wall which cut off Mr. Bartholomew's premises from the adjoining properties. Here he paused and began tucking the ends of his dark raincoat up inside the belt, so that they should not hamper him. He was flattened against the wall, completely invisible, a strained, tautened creature of prey, alert for every sound and movement in the shadows around him.

With the skirts of the coat adjusted properly, he whipped off his hat and donned the cowl-like mask which was notorious. Then he leaped upward at the wall. Only a trained athlete could have performed that standing jump, and could have hauled himself with such facile ease to the wall top. He lay flat for a few moments after he reached it, listening. No sound came to him except the monotonous dribble of the rain in the gutterways, and the hum of an occasional passing motor droning sullenly through the wet darkness.

He stood up, and ran along the top of the wall, his feet unfaltering on the narrow trail, his balance perfect. The wall abutted the house side, and above it was an iron veranda outside the French window of a bedroom. The Gray Wolf jumped upward to this veranda. It was the action of a strong, steel-nerved man, for had he failed to grasp the bars he must have dropped, not on the wall, but down to the stones many feet below. He gripped the ironwork

and drew himself up. The window fastening was a thing to be laughed at, and the burglar alarm circuit was put out of commission in a twinkling. In a few seconds he was in the house. The whole operation had been carried out with cat-like swiftness and silence.

He stood for an atom of time inside the window, straining his ears for footsteps or voices. The great house was as quiet as a sepulcher. From his pocket, he took an electric torch, covered the bulb with his hand, and switched the light on. The smothered radiance gave him a quick layout of the room, and with the gleam once more extinguished, he stole forward.

Once in the corridor, he walked unfalteringly toward Mr. Bartholomew's room. As he went, he reflected on the peril of it. This was no time to rob a man's house, when all the lights were flaring and everybody was about. One o'clock in the morning was the best hour, the hour of sleep and heaviness, or before the dawn when death creeps nearer the sleeper than at any time during the twenty-four hours. But in these days, he was finding things complicated. He had to create alibis, not for the benefit of the police, but for his friends. He dared not stay out all night without some reasonable excuse. His actions were hampered. There were a hundred details to consider now, in every move he made, where before there had been but one.

The game was growing more intricate and dangerous every day. The straight trail he had planned for himself was twisting more and more, and the end of it was lost to him. Yet, on this evening, he should be fairly safe, for he had learned that Mr. Bartholomew was to be at the theater. It gave him an hour. That was all he wanted.

The landing at the stairhead came in sight, and with it he heard a woman's voice humming a popular song melody lazily and softly. One of the maids was

coming upstairs. He leaped aside into a room, darkened and empty. The maid walked on down the corridor, dawdling, still humming, unconscious that the dreaded Gray Wolf could have touched her sleeve in passing.

The intruder went on to Mr. Bartholomew's room. He knew it well, and knew its furniture placings, so that there was no need for him to use his torch to find his way straight from the door across to the little circular wall safe.

Once at the safe, however, he permitted himself a few moments of his flash lamp, directing the light on the disk of the combination and searching keenly for marks of wear. But the dial showed none, and it was impossible to distinguish which numbers were used most.

The Gray Wolf swore softly to himself, dropped his lamp into his pocket, and lifted his cowl on the left side. Then, with his ear set against the cold hard door of the safe, he began to twirl the combination knob with deft fingers. The night seemed to wait breathless, as he did so.

The combination whirred, and he strained anxiously for the sliding of wards. His long, strong fingers handled the knob with the delicacy of a violinist. His eyes, tight closed, shut out even the shadowy outline of the walls and furniture.

One! He heard a gentle movement, steel running on steel, perfectly machined, well-oiled. His tenseness increased.

Minutes sped by. The strain of it was bringing the perspiration to his forehead in great beads. Mr. Bartholomew had chosen his safe well.

And then the silence was shattered and the spell was broken. He had purposely left the door of the room ajar, so that he should be warned of the approach of even the most light-footed servant, and through the opening there came to his ears a voice he knew full well.

"Not at home?" It was from the hall of the house. The Gray Wolf, his cowl pulled down, his fingers still on the combination knob, straightened up, listening. "Well, I think I'll wait. He knows I'm coming."

Another voice answered in low tones, and the first speaker laughed.

"Don't worry about that. He'll cut the third act for me. All right, I know the way to his room."

Chagrin flared in the heart of the Gray Wolf. He had wasted all this time and effort, had thrown it away!

For a moment he hesitated, swaying on an impulse to get away while he was safe. Then he saw the heavy pile curtains which draped the window. They were pulled aside, but the man entering the room would not know that. If he stood behind them, pulling them into position, this man would notice nothing extraordinary in it; while, when Mr. Bartholomew arrived, he would expect to find the curtains drawn, seeing that the visitor would be in the room with the light switched on.

The Gray Wolf stepped across to the window recess and noiselessly pulled the curtains across in front of him, so that he was entirely hidden from anybody else in the room. He had hardly done so when the door was pushed open and he heard a hand fumble for the switch. There was a click, and the lights leaped up. The visitor walked into the room. It was Sarson.

CHAPTER XVI.

A MESSAGE FROM THE NIGHT.

THE Gray Wolf watched Sarson through a narrow opening in the curtains, and as he did so his hand was on the butt of an automatic pistol in his pocket.

Sarson looked about the luxurious room and breathed noisily. "Does well by himself, damned is he doesn't!" he murmured.

He made no attempt to sit down, but strolled aimlessly about, and the concealed observer could see by the movements of his giant shoulders and the twitching of his great hands, that he was in a state of considerable nervous excitement. He examined the litter on the desk top, picking up a book, looking at the back of it, and tossing it down, with some petulance. Then he ran over the various papers, reading the letters without scruple, and laughing now and again as though something tickled him immensely.

In those moments he reminded the Gray Wolf of some gigantic, clumsy dog, pawing about, growling to himself, in a vicious temper, ready to fight and bite anything and anybody. He turned once toward the window, and made as though to walk to it and pull aside the curtains and look out. The hidden man stiffened. In all his lurid, adventurous life, Sarson had never been in such peril as at that moment, but the peril was averted when his eyes caught the wall safe and he strode across and stood in front of it. One of his enormous hands went out and stroked its cold, impassive face.

"If you could speak," he muttered to himself, "I bet you could tell a tale. Are they inside your little tummy, eh? Did he put 'em there? Or is he tipping me the straight dope? I wonder."

He stepped nearer, as though on impulse, and like the Gray Wolf, examined the combination dial. Then he laughed ironically.

"Trust Barty not to have a dial which gives the show away. Not he!"

He grabbed the knob and twirled it with a twitch of his finger and thumb, watching it run itself to a standstill with a detached curiosity. With its stopping, he stretched out his hand to give it another twist. Just then, from behind him, came a smooth, placid voice.

"Good evening, Sarson!"

The visitor spun around with a

guilty cry, like a boy caught in some peccadillo.

Mr. Bartholomew, in immaculate evening attire, was standing in the doorway of the room.

Sarson recovered himself. "Hello!" he said. "Thought you'd forgotten."

"Not at all." Mr. Bartholomew approached the table. "Nice little safe, isn't it?" His eyes ran over his desk. "Find my letters interesting?"

Sarson laughed. There was no mirth in the laugh, and its accent proclaimed it forced. "You're a cute hand," he said. "I might have known you'd left your things arranged."

"Of course, you might. You've deteriorated, Sarson. But sit down. Don't stand about like a lout waiting for his best girl."

The caller threw himself into a chair, and Mr. Bartholomew seated himself behind the desk. "How about a Scotch and splash?" he said.

"All right." Sarson's nervous excitement had vanished, and in its stead was a sullen resentment.

A manservant brought a bottle of whisky and a siphon, and before he withdrew, Mr. Bartholomew gave him instructions that they were on no account to be disturbed.

When the door was closed, he poured out two liberal drinks, and said: "Well, what is it? I presume your urgent message meant business."

Sarson gulped half his liquor down and nodded. "It did. I've been thinking, Bartholomew, since we last met."

"Yes." Mr. Bartholomew was his usual calm, watchful self, all suavity and politeness; yet Sarson sensed something different about him, a tenseness, an air of strain, as though he watched and waited.

"And," added Sarson bluntly, "I've come to the conclusion that you're a liar!"

Mr. Bartholomew's eyes bored into his visitor's face. His equanimity was

in nowise disturbed by the insult. His beautifully kept, white fingers toyed with the whisky glass.

"What makes you come to that rather brutal conclusion, Sarson?"

The other hesitated. He evidently found it difficult to find substantial arguments to support his statement. He descended to mere affirmation. "Because I don't trust you, Bartholomew. I've been thinking about this Gray Wolf. He's a wise guy, and as such, he's not going to label a dead man as having been murdered by him. It was realizing that which first started me to suspecting you again. Then I ran over all the reasons why you should have murdered Cunningham and taken the jewels. You know them. I've told you them already." His voice became fiercely assertive. "I tell you right now, Bartholomew, that you can say what you like and do what you like, but I shall believe all through that you've got the loot."

Mr. Bartholomew nodded. "You were never logical, Sarson. You could never reason."

Sarson shook his head. "I know. I've said it before. Always took the bull by the horns. That was me. For you, there was always the dodging round corners. But you've come to the last corner where I'm concerned, Bartholomew. You can paste that in your hat. I'm through with lies, through with excuses. I want my share! And, by Heaven, I mean to have it!"

"Sarson!" Mr. Bartholomew's tone was mildly remonstrative.

The big man's jaw set. "I don't leave this room without an understanding.

Mr. Bartholomew leaned back. His face was very placid, and his eyes rested steadily on his visitor's face, but all the time it was obvious that he was thinking, considering, planning.

Sarson evidently realized this, for he interjected shortly: "Lies won't help you, Bartholomew. Understand?"

5C—DS

"I understand."

Mr. Bartholomew took up his glass and drained it, then poured himself another helping. "More?" he invited.

Sarson shook his head doggedly.

Then Mr. Bartholomew made his decision. He spoke very gently. "Before going any further, Sarson, I would remind you that I have definite proof regarding the murder of Barringley, eleven years ago."

Sarson laughed hoarsely. "That's a threat, eh? All right! Go on! I killed Barringley and I know you can get me hanged for it. If you're intending to use it to close my mouth about Cunningham, I admit it. But I shouldn't get the law to kill *you*, Bartholomew, if you double crossed me. I could do that myself."

"Of course, Sarson." The threat seemed to pass Mr. Bartholomew unnoticed. "I merely mentioned it so that we may quite understand each other at the outset; to remind you that my memory is long."

"Oh, cut out the cackle!"

"Certainly. Sarson, I have decided to tell you the truth, and before doing so, I would emphasize that your threats have not been instrumental in forcing me to do this, so much as other circumstances which I propose to explain."

"What d'you mean?" demanded the other aggressively.

"I mean that you and I stand in danger. But listen."

"I'm listening." Sarson evidently did not believe this last statement.

"I have the jewels," said Mr. Bartholomew calmly.

Sarson's eyes lit, and then his face suffused with blood. "I knew it!" he said quietly. "You swine!"

"That doesn't help you, Sarson. And, before going any further, I would tell you that my admission that I have the jewels in no way implies that I am connected with the murder of poor old Hector."

The big man laughed derisively. "You were always good on the hypocritical stuff, Bartholomew. Tell me some more."

Mr. Bartholomew went on patiently. "I am telling you that and that only. I have the jewels. How they came into my possession, and when, I do not think it necessary to state."

"Let's have a look at them!" said Sarson.

Mr. Bartholomew hesitated, met his visitor's eyes, read the determined ferocity deep down in them, and surrendered. He had conceded so much, because of the danger which threatened him, and he must concede more. He crossed to the safe, adjusted the combination, and took out a little box.

"They reached me loose," he said. "You'll remember their original box was found beside poor Vector. I put them in here for convenience." He placed the box on the desk, and snapped the lid up.

Sarson stared at the jewels, a bed of living, leaping flame in the somberness of the box lining. "Good!" There was a hoarse note in his voice.

Mr. Bartholomew shut the box and dropped his bombshell. "After you had gone the other night, I had a visit from the Gray Wolf!"

"What?" Even the jewels were forgotten by Sarson.

"It's perfectly true. He came in, stuck me up with a gun, and demanded these jewels. An accidental entry by one of my servants drove him off. Before he went, he told me something which is of vital importance to you and me, Sarson."

"What is it?" demanded Sarson.

Mr. Bartholomew rapidly outlined the Gray Wolf's story of vengeance, of how he had followed the trail of the Brethren of the Shadows all through the years, and how, at last, he was nearing the end of that trail.

When Mr. Bartholomew had finished,

there were beads of perspiration about Sarson's temples. "Have you done anything?" he demanded quickly. "You haven't sat down——"

"I have made inquiries regarding a gentleman named Langley," said Mr. Bartholomew quietly. "And——"

The telephone bell interrupted him, and he picked up the receiver. In a few seconds he had replaced it, and Sarson saw that his cheeks were ghastly.

"What's the matter, Bartholomew?"

Mr. Bartholomew indicated the telephone. "That call—a man's voice. It said that the Gray Wolf entered this house twenty minutes ago and has not yet left it!"

CHAPTER XVII.

FIRST TRICK.

SILENCE reigned in the room, while Sarson stared at Mr. Bartholomew and Mr. Bartholomew stared at Sarson. Behind the curtains, the Gray Wolf stood rigid. If that announcement of Mr. Bartholomew's had filled Sarson and himself with fear, it had absolutely staggered the Gray Wolf!

He was known! His identity was no longer a secret locked close in his own breast. The veil of mystery surrounding him had been torn aside, even if only a little, so that one man might peep through and see him as he really was!

Furthermore, this man who knew his identity was watching him. He knew he had entered the house; had allowed him to enter; and then, in a spirit of mischief, had telephoned Mr. Bartholomew.

Often had the Gray Wolf known that sense of dominance which enabled him to toy with those he had marked down as his particular prey. Now he appreciated something of the feelings of his victims, to be known, yet not to know; to be watched, yet to be powerless to name the watcher; to be threatened, and unable to point to any place whence danger might come.

That the mysterious user of Mr. Bartholomew's telephone had discovered his identity was sufficient proof that he was a formidable individual, one with whom he must reckon in all future workings.

In a flash the Gray Wolf realized that all his plan of campaign must henceforth be altered. He had fought against the law, a lone hand, and a winning hand; but on his side had been the safe shield of anonymity. Now he was known. He had to carry through his schemes under the eyes of somebody who was hidden from him. It was a conception to make the most resolute man pause. Yet he was so near to achieving his object, the thing for which he had striven through ten long years of dreadful effort.

One bold stroke, and he had the two men at the table in the hollow of his hand, could toy with them as he listed, put them on the rack, punish them after his own fashion. He would not go back now; he could not! He had to keep on! Into his thoughts broke Sarson's voice.

"What're you giving me, Bartholomew?" Behind the bravado of it was a vast uneasiness.

Mr. Bartholomew dabbed his forehead with a shaking hand. "What I've just heard. What do you think? This fellow says the Gray Wolf is in the house."

Sarson laughed uneasily. "Somebody's kidding you. It's a practical joker."

"Don't be a damn fool, Sarson!"

"Who's a fool?" The great, ungainly man was glowering, angry.

The crisp, dramatic announcement over the telephone had set the pair of rascals yapping at each other like startled curs. Behind the curtain, the Gray Wolf was trying to think. Mr. Bartholomew got to his feet, walked over to the sideboard, and took from the drawer a nickel-plated revolver.

"What're you going to do?" demanded Sarson.

"Raise an alarm!" replied Mr. Bar-

tholomew grimly, examining the weapon to make sure that it was loaded. "I'll search this house from top to bottom."

His recovered steadiness had an effect on Sarson, who cooled somewhat and began to look less heated and scared.

It was significant that in their agitation both of them had forgotten the jewels reposing in the box on the desktop. Sarson remembered them first.

Mr. Bartholomew went to the door and pulled it open. "Hawkins!" He was calling for his secretary.

From the floor above came a reply. "Yes, sir?"

"Get Jakins and Brown, and come down here at once."

It was then that Sarson thought of the jewels. He had been watching Mr. Bartholomew's back during this summoning of the menservants, and while that gentleman awaited their arrival, still standing in the doorway, Sarson's eyes wandered round the room and lighted on the jewel box.

The Gray Wolf was watching him all the time. He noticed Sarson stiffen, and saw his enormous hands clench hard. Instinctively, the huge man looked around swiftly, like a petty thief about to snatch something from a counter. He made as though to move toward the desk, when Mr. Bartholomew turned his head.

"I'll send Brown and Jakins to search the floor above this, and you, Hawkins and myself will take this floor."

"All right," said Sarson gruffly, striving to appear at his ease.

Mr. Bartholomew considered him. "What's the matter with you, Sarson?" he asked abruptly.

"Oh, lay off me! You get hold of the Gray Wolf!"

Mr. Bartholomew laughed quietly. By this time he was absolutely composed once more. "Never thought you were yellow, Sarson."

Footsteps outside announced the ar-

rival of Hawkins and the other men, and Mr. Bartholomew turned to them.

"There's a burglar in the house," he announced. "Jakins, go with Brown and search the upper part of the house thoroughly. Tell nobody, and don't alarm the maids. Mr. Hawkins, this gentleman and myself will search all around here. Hurry!"

"Yes, sir!" The men made off.

While Mr. Bartholomew was giving them their instructions, Sarson acted. He stepped forward very softly, picked up the jewel box, and dropped it into his pocket; then he walked to the door, so that he stood behind Mr. Bartholomew, with all his great bulk between his host and the room.

The Gray Wolf stirred uneasily. If Sarson got out of the house he would vanish, and the long trail would begin again. The only thing which kept this loose-limbed wanderer chained to that part of the world was the box which reposed in his pocket. These jewels were the magnet for the Brethren, the thing which held them close together, so that he could strike at them surely and swiftly.

He looked out of the window. There was an iron balcony beyond, and there were similar balconies outside the other windows, both to the right and to the left. He heard Mr. Bartholomew giving instructions to Hawkins and Sarson.

"Sarson, you take the left-hand corridor and go right round it, searching each room, until you meet us. Hawkins and I are going to the right. I——"

The Gray Wolf waited for no more. Silently, he unfastened the window and stepped out to the balcony. Then, closing the window after him, he climbed to the rail on the left-hand side. It was still raining, and pitch dark. The farther balcony was indistinct and appeared to lack solidity. Below, was a thirty-foot drop to the flag stones.

The Gray Wolf jumped! He had

been supporting himself against the wall with his hand, while he balanced on the narrow iron rail, and with his hand he helped his legs to give him the send-off. He cleared the rail of the farther balcony by a fraction of an inch, landing on his toes on the balcony floor, with feline lightness.

"Phew!" He sighed with relief. That leap in the dark had been the riskiest thing of his whole career.

With that, he opened the window and stepped into the room. It was a little chamber, furnished in an occasional fashion, and was apparently little used, for it bore no definite marks of a personality about it.

All this action had occupied a few seconds, and he could hear Mr. Bartholomew finishing off what had apparently been some small discussion between himself and Sarson.

"And you're big enough to look after yourself, Sarson; so don't argue. Get along!"

A grunt from the lumbering scoundrel and a shuffle of feet on the padded carpet, told that the men were moving.

The Gray Wolf moved silently to the door and opened it gently. The room was perfectly dark, but the corridor outside was alight, so that when he opened the door he was visible to anybody walking along the hallway. In this way Sarson saw him.

The big, awkward fellow came along indolently, not caring whether he found the Gray Wolf or not, rejoicing in the knowledge that the jewels were in his pocket, and wondering how long it would be before Mr. Bartholomew remembered having left them on the desktop. Not long, he thought; but in the interval it would have been possible for the Gray Wolf to have stolen them! Sarson was already rehearsing the violent and vituperative remarks he was going to hurl at Mr. Bartholomew's head for his carelessness, when his eyes rested on the Gray Wolf.

The latter was standing with the door half open. Low down in front of him winked a blue-black automatic pistol, and its barrel was dead in line with Sarson's solar plexus. The Gray Wolf's left index finger was laid across that section of the mask which covered his lips.

Sarson checked himself, and stopped, his jaw fell. The Gray Wolf's warning finger beckoned to him, and with the signal the pistol jerked significantly. The extraordinary part of the whole episode was that Mr. Bartholomew and Hawkins were still in the corridor, at the far end.

Sarson stepped toward the Gray Wolf. That formidable being's reputation, plus the threatening automatic, were quite enough to insure implicit obedience.

"In here!" whispered the Gray Wolf.

He stepped back and to one side, becoming invisible in the shadows of the room. Sarson walked in blindly, and as he did so the Gray Wolf quietly shut the door and switched on the lights! The big man turned in a flash, snarling, hoping that the movement had given him a chance to attack. The pistol stared into his infuriated face.

"All right!" said the Gray Wolf coolly. "We have a few seconds together, Sarson. I want to say one thing to you. Give me those jewels!"

"Haven't got——"

"Don't lie! Out with them!"

"I tell you——"

The Gray Wolf stepped closer to his captive. It was a lightning movement with a horrid threat in it which sent the hulking creature staggering backwards.

"Not another word from you, Sarson!"

The hand which was not clutching the pistol was outstretched. Sarson stood hesitant, swaying in indecision, yet murderously sullen. Then, with a gesture of despair, he dipped his hand into his coat pocket and produced the box. He

held it out, and, as the Gray Wolf went to take it, allowed it to fall to the floor.

"That trick won't serve," observed the Gray Wolf. "I never stoop, instinctively. Pick it up!"

Sarson bent and his hand closed over the box. As he did so, he lurched forward, head first! His great weight cannoned against the Gray Wolf's legs, and the masked man went back against the door with a crash.

Sarson loosed a tremendous shout! He still had the jewel box in his hand. The jewels remained his, and there was a chance for him to hold them! If the Gray Wolf escaped—— That was the way. Let the Gray Wolf escape, and pretend he had taken the jewels with him!

But the automatic; Sarson had to deal with that first. All this had flashed through his mind instantaneously, and, following on the smashing of the Gray Wolf against the door, he shot out his hand for the weapon. He seized it, and so large was his hand, that he also grabbed the hand which held the gun.

Both were cold.

Outside, he could hear Mr. Bartholomew and Hawkins hurrying toward the room. He twisted the hand and the pistol. The wrench must have caused the Gray Wolf intense pain, but he uttered no sound. He went sidewise, staggered, his arm bent frightfully in Sarson's iron grip.

"Drop it!" the giant commanded.

The weapon thudded to the floor.

Instinctively, Sarson's grip on the hand relaxed, and the Gray Wolf loosed his counterblow. Bartholomew and Hawkins were at the door then. The handle was rattling. The Gray Wolf pulled his hand free and jumped toward Sarson at the same time. The latter tried to recover his advantage, but the Gray Wolf hooked him with tremendous force on the jaw.

Forward came Sarson, falling like a stricken tree. The jewel box was in

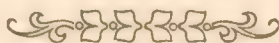
the hands of the Gray Wolf in a second, and he was back against the wall, flat! The door was flung open. Mr. Bartholomew saw Sarson falling, and rushed in with a cry. Hawkins was at his heels.

The Gray Wolf's foot shot out. Down on his face went Mr. Bartholomew. Hawkins was grabbed by the back of the neck and pulled on top of his employer. The lights went out. The door slammed!

By the time they extricated themselves and by the time Jakins and Brown, with several of the maids, who had been alarmed by the noise, arrived on the scene, the Gray Wolf had vanished. Yet—significant of the coolness and daring of the man—he had found time to leave behind that which he called his visiting card.

On the desk in Mr. Bartholomew's room, where the jewel box had reposed, gleamed a little gray wolf!

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



PRISON INMATES COMMUNICATE BY SECRET CODE.

THE ingenious methods by which inmates of prisons manage to communicate with one another from cell to cell were revealed a short time ago in an interesting interview credited to Waldemar Kaempffert. "How convicts use water pipes to speak with fellow convicts a few hundred feet away has been disclosed time and again," said Kaempffert, "by novelists who have dealt with the life of caged men. But in a modern jail this is impossible, for the pipes are inaccessible. However, the equally old system of tapping on a cell wall is still in vogue. If a convict does not know the Morse code before he enters prison, he will learn it before he is many weeks older. Every prison is a school of telegraphy. It becomes a necessity, for the simple reason that the American 'silent' system—a system which forbids even whispered conversation in the cells—is now generally adopted.

"When he is locked up for the night, a convict must be as dumb as any beast; more so, indeed; he cannot even growl and snarl without incurring punishment. So necessity drives a man to use his fingers. At night a prison is a place of uncanny scratchings, rappings, and tappings, which are heard by eternally vigilant keepers, but which cannot be accurately placed. Threats, curses, plans for future crimes, encouraging words for relatives to be transmitted by a man about to be released—all are telegraphed from cell to cell until they reach their destination.

"There is also physical communication between adjacent cells, even though masonry and steel may separate the inmates—communication effected by means of the jute string and hook which convicts treasure as priceless, but forbidden, possessions. At night when the slippered keeper slinks along the corridors, almost unheard except for the soft fall of a leopardlike foot on the stone floor, a convict will tap gently on the wall of his cell. Presently there come answering taps. 'Ready,' they say. Each man takes his hook and jute string and coils it up like a lariat. With a deftness that commands admiration he flips the string through the bars of his cell door toward his neighbor. The strings cross. They are pulled taut. An artificial hand has been created which performs the miracle of passing from one cage of steel and stone and intruding into another. One man releases his end, and his string is hauled in. At its end a little package is tied. It may be a message, a knife, a saw, a file, but more often it is morphine, opium, cocaine or heroin, for probably half the inmates of our State prisons are slaves of drugs."

"Just for Luck"

by Donald Van Riper

Author of "Too Much Work."

WAIT a minute!" muttered "Pee-wee" Burke. "Wait a minute!" "Biggy" Mullane waited, impatiently looking back, while Pee-wee extracted a coin from his pocket and flipped it into the conveniently placed hat of the blind man seated against the building wall. Without any show of self-approval Pee-wee turned away and caught up with Biggy Mullane.

"Wot's eating you?" demanded Biggy. "Acting like Rockerfeller won't make you rich. Wot's the idea falling for a bum faker like that?"

"Good luck," chortled Pee-wee. "Never pass up a blind beggar. Always give'm something. Bad luck if you don't."

"Bad luck!" moaned Biggy. "Say, if our luck could be any worse! You, with them superstitious hunches of yours! We ain't got a dollar between us. How much did you give'm?"

"A thin one," answered Pee-wee. "Silver's better luck."

"You and your luck," scoffed Biggy. "You make me tired. Superstition—Bah!"

"Ps-st!" Pee-wee side-stepped, violently and dragged Biggy with him.

"Wot the——" began Biggy.

"A cockeyed man!" wheezed Pee-wee. "Did you see him?"

"Who wants to see a cockeyed man?" said Biggy.

"You're lucky," commented Pee-wee. "I saw him. I hope I crossed my fingers quick enough."

"Bah!" That was all Biggy Mullane could say. He was in a continual state

of disgust with the curious ideas shown by the diminutive Pee-wee Burke.

"All right," warned Pee-wee. "You can laugh, but it's so just the same."

"There's one queer thing about all those hunches of yours, Pee-wee," observed the big chap. "They's all bad hunches. Ain't there any sign for good luck?"

"Sure! A white horse."

"Huh? Might as well look for a pink one. A horse of any kind nowadays is a *rare birdis*."

"Can the Latin," hissed Pee-wee. "You and your education make me sick."

"Don't you talk. Education's got superstition licked any day in the week."

At this retort Pee-wee Burke merely grunted with an abruptness and harshness of tone more eloquent than words.

Thereafter they marched along in silence, indicative not simply of a mutual exasperation, but also of a common plan of action. Pee-wee's short, choppy steps and the long, slouching strides of Biggy assumed a strange appearance of congruity in this silent march away from the Rialto block with its glaring white light at full flood. They were heading, as they had planned, to the other end of Market Street, where beside the railroad embankment stood the Stirner Building. The final objective was the office of Peter Stirner himself.

However it was the office, and not the man, that had attracted their attention; or, rather, it was the safe in the office. By the devious paths of their subworld Pee-wee and Biggy had learned of the safe and its contents. A discon-

tented and discharged henchman of Pete Stirner's political machine had taken one drink too many and, while indulging in unwarranted confidences with Peewee and Biggy, had told them startling facts.

The story that had so stirred them was that Peter Stirner, power in many political, social, and industrial layers of life in Breenston, had a fund of ready cash always on hand in his office safe. By judicious and well-masked pumping operations Peewee and Biggy had discovered that the sum was at least one thousand dollars, and, further more, that at times it was nearer six or seven times one thousand.

Eventually by prolonged espionage they learned all they needed to know concerning the scene of their projected operations. For instance, they had discovered that between nine and ten o'clock on Saturday nights the Stirner Building was a particularly easy place to enter and leave.

A watchman guarded several buildings on the block, but he had become lax from the sheer monotony of an unending row of uneventful nights. Also he greatly liked cakes and coffee which were obtainable a block away in an all-night owl wagon. Shortly after nine he departed to eat, and just before ten he returned.

As for the police, there was a perfunctory patrol of the neighborhood, an unmethodical marching about by one lone officer. His name neither Peewee or Biggy knew, but they did know his appearance and easy-going ways.

The Stirner Building housed a group of kindred souls to the owner, and Saturday night found the tenants one and all in the busy districts a few blocks away. Peter Stirner, boss extraordinary, was well advertised, and so the two crooks knew that to-night he was going to address a meeting at Public School No. 9, far across town.

With an assured air that foretold their

success, Peewee and Biggy came to the Stirner Building. One careful survey sufficed before they plunged into the darkness of the areaway. After that they worked with a cool neatness that bespoke thorough practice in their calling.

Biggy manipulated the jimmy beneath the window's edge, pulled slowly at first, and then in one swift tug completed the task. The lock snapped noisily, but they had expected that. Besides, who ever suspected an outright racket in connection with robbery.

Now it was Peewee's turn to take the lead. Having carefully donned gloves he was boosted up by Biggy's huge paws, also gloved, and, thus supported, he quietly eased the window open. Then he crawled inside, and in a moment Biggy, with the help of the little man's outstretched hands, had followed.

Briskly they proceeded with the aid of flash lights to size up the room. Here the sometime doubtful practices of Peter Stirner's uncouth political schemes offered a great advantage. Against the eyes of overly curious reformers Stirner had heavy green shades that fitted perfectly against the windows and door glass of his room. These were promptly turned to account by the crafty Peewee.

"Turn on the lights," suggested Peewee.

"Are you crazy?" gasped Biggy. "Wot's the idea?"

Peewee laughed, his former ill-nature vanished. He delighted to think faster than Biggy.

"Those shades I just fastened," he observed, "fit like corks in the windows. Stirner has made this place spy-proof."

"Oh!" exclaimed Biggy, as he pressed the switch.

"Now," snapped Peewee, "you've got lots of light to work with. Do your stuff."

The husky did not waste any time before he set to work in the safe. He

made one comment before he started his job.

"Gee, this is easy, Peewee! Old-time safe. I'll feel my way through this combination in ten minutes."

Biggy by long experience was an expert in reading the slight sound of the tumblers in safe locks. He worked patiently and steadily till he had read the right combination. After that he had only to open the outer door. Peewee could pick any cabinet lock inside.

As Biggy worked, his partner stepped about with infinite caution, lest he disturb the progress of the lock reading. Peewee regarded the pictures first, old prints of conventions, a portrait of a local brewer, a highly colored picture of Peter Stirner himself. It was only after a second glance at this portrait that Peewee breathed easier.

At first glance he had almost imagined the pictured eyes of Peter Stirner were crossed. His second inspection revealed the fact that the color had blurred and created this illusion. Nevertheless Peewee turned somewhat sharply away from this evil suggestion of optical weakness.

Peewee turned and faced the opposite wall. Then he gasped very audibly. "Wot now?" Biggy growled over his shoulder.

"The—the—the——" stuttered Peewee. "The calendar!"

"Wot about it?" hissed Biggy.

"It says Friday, the thirteenth."

Biggy snarled angrily. "Well that was yesterday. Today's Saturday, the fourteenth."

"But the calendar says——"

"Shut up!" was Biggy's advice.

Peewee stared at the huge wall calendar, and his teeth fairly chattered. Why had the boobs forgotten to tear off that black-lettered sheet of paper? It was a sign. He knew it was a sign. In fact he said as much.

"Sure it's a sign," was Biggy's ir-

ritable response. "That's what a calendar is—a sign—a sign of the times."

"You and your education!" wheezed Peewee. "Always quoting the classics."

"Forget it," said Biggy, "and forget that piece of paper. Tear it off!"

"Tear it off!" exploded Peewee. "Not me. I wouldn't touch that—not unless I had a lucky hunch first——"

"Gwan," sneered Biggy. "Look for a white horse."

"Look—look——" Peewee's voice trailed away to a whisper. He had an inspiration. He would look for a pin. That was an old stand-by. "See a pin and pick it up—all the day you have good luck."

"Shut up!"

Peewee sought in silence for the tiny bit of metal he felt must be somewhere about. At last he came to the flat-topped desk, littered with papers. There lay a pin.

He reached for it, closed his fingers, and failed to get it. That was bad. Here was a pin, and he couldn't pick it up. Again he tried and yet again. Those gloves were certainly clumsy. Now he thought of nothing else but the pin. Two more futile attempts, then he removed a glove. His nervousness must have got into his fingers. He lost it twice and pawed it out from the papers. The third time it snapped to the floor.

Peewee squatted in swift search at Biggy's side.

"Wot the——" began Biggy, but Peewee did not deign to answer.

Several more tries and Peewee had picked up the pin. There was another part of this ritual that he must observe. It was good luck to stick the pin in wood. He drove it squarely into the filing-case top. Then with something almost akin to bravado he marched on and tore down the offending sheet. He stepped back with obvious approval to read the new day and numeral disclosed: "Saturday—the fourteenth!" That was better.

He roamed about the office again daring to look directly at the queer eyes of the colored picture of Peter Stirner, finding in the picked-up and salvaged pin a certain courage to bring to this cool glance at the atrocious portrait. He had passed on to a more detailed inspection of the other pictures when Mullane called softly to him:

"Hey, Peewee, did you get that pin?"

"Yes!"

"Well, try your luck at picking these keyholes."

"You got the combination?" asked Peewee, not without a pronounced inflection of approval.

"I got it? Of course!" Biggy's matter-of-fact acceptance of Peewee's admiration goaded the latter to excellent work.

Swiftly and with uncanny ease he fished through the lock, using wires and keys from his set of skeleton and master keys. The second compartment opened to reveal the cash on hand, otherwise graft money, of the Honorable—and at times dishonorable—Mr. Stirner.

"Ah"—Biggy looked at Peewee—"that Friday-the-thirteenth sign didn't mean a thing."

Peewee looked up from counting the money, acute disgust registered on his features. "Say," he drawled, "if I hadn't found that pin and picked it up——"

"I suppose that cash would have melted into mush," sneered Biggy. "How much is there?" he added promptly.

"One thousand three hundred," answered Peewee.

"Thirteen hundred," exulted Biggy. "Whoops, my boy! Thirteen hundred dollars——"

"One thousand three hundred," interrupted Peewee, and there was a beligerent glint in his small, dark eyes. "One thousand three hundred."

"Split it," chuckled Biggy. "Then we won't have to worry about the luck of the number of the hundreds."

After the division had been made,

Peewee made a last survey of the safe. In a small drawer without a lock he found two round disks, bright and yellow, five-dollar gold pieces.

"One for you and one for me," he announced. "And now let's beat it."

He started for the window when Biggy protested.

"Wot's the use of that, Peewee? We can go right out the front door—careful like, you know."

"That's right. It locks one way, but not the other. I remember now. We go out like gentlemen."

Like gentlemen they did exit, but not until Peewee had spied out on the street's emptiness.

"G'wan," he hissed.

Biggy stepped out. Just as Peewee followed, there came the dolorous crescendo howl of a dog from far down the street. Peewee jumped away, with no further thought for doors or anything else. Only the great hard hands of Biggy Mullane prevented abject flight.

"Wot now?" was Biggy's intolerant question.

"D'you hear it?" gasped Peewee. "D'you?"

"Wot?"

"That dog howling. That's a bad sign. Means bad luck—and death."

They were walking rapidly away, as Peewee said this. Biggy compelled a mutual stop, as he addressed his companion.

"It'll be your death if you don't quit harping on that sign business."

"All right," muttered Peewee somewhat plaintively. "Wait and see."

But Biggy was not minded to wait at all, and so in abrupt rebuke he started to cut diagonally across the corner they had reached. Peewee started after him. He had almost overtaken him when he recollected a very terrifying thing.

"Wait a minute," he called.

Biggy turned about to see the diminutive Mr. Burke abruptly face about and

march back to the corner they had just quit. He scowled in wonderment. Peewee circled the corner telephone post with elaborate care and again faced Biggy. Just at that instant a blue-coated figure had rounded the corner and stared at the amazing evolution of Peewee. Biggy instantly ceased to manifest interest in his partner and resumed walking. Behind him he heard Peewee in hurried pursuit.

"You fool," hissed Biggy. "That cop saw you."

"I—I—I——" stammered Peewee, "I went back to get around that post. We passed on opposite sides. Cuts friendship, you know."

"Bah!"

Once more they marched along in silence, a silence that was dangerously stubborn till they came again to the bright glare of the Rialto, a moving picture show.

Again Peewee paused before the blind beggar just to the left of the entrance, his hand reaching into his pocket. Biggy edged closer, hovering like some threatening demon at Peewee's elbow. Even then he would have permitted this performance, but for one thing.

And this he decided to put to the test.

Peewee extracted a coin and deliberately flipped it toward the hat. Biggy looking toward the lights saw the glint of yellow. He snatched and caught the falling gold piece.

"Almost give him a five-dollar gold piece!" he roared.

And then, before Peewee could protest and move, Biggy grabbed both collar and belt of the little man and faced him about.

"Now march!" he ordered. "We're bound for Flannery's place. Forget that lucky stuff and march."

Thus, by compulsion he propelled the struggling Peewee to Flannery's cafe, where they held honored places at the bar and also rented a room. It was the worst evening for signs Biggy had ever

known. He almost felt bound to kick Peewee heartily.

After all, outside of his superstitions, Peewee was a good pal. As soon as they reached Flannery's they would have some forbidden liquid refreshment. That would thaw Peewee out a little. He forcibly accelerated Peewee's pace. But the schedule of drinks that would have brought Peewee to the good-natured stage was not destined to be achieved. In fact, Peewee and Biggy had just comfortably ordered their second, when the swinging doors opened, and two uniformed policemen entered.

"There they are," announced the one in the lead.

Peewee and Biggy stared dazedly at the advancing foe. One man was the patrolman who had watched Peewee circle the post.

"Come along," he said to the partners. Then, as they protested, the second officer laughed shortly. "You're pinched!"

The patrolman suddenly seized Peewee's left arm. "Say," he observed, "the mate of that glove I found in Stirner's office."

Biggy groaned aloud. He remembered seeing Peewee picking up that pin. The little fool! However, Biggy reserved his fire until a better time. Only after they had been docketed and lodged together in a cell did the feelings of Biggy Mullane compel him to speak.

"You and your luck! If you hadn't seen that date on the wall; if you hadn't picked up that pin and forgot your glove; if you hadn't heard that dog howl and forgot to close the door of the Stirner Building; if you hadn't run back to get on the right side of a post and attracted that cop's attention——"

"Yeah," Peewee whispered scornfully, "and if you had let me give the coin to the blind man, he wouldn't have noticed what we said about Flannery's."

"Bah," grumbled Biggy. "You and your luck! You know they got us. That

cop saw us on the corner, goes down the street and notices the open door, goes in and finds the safe robbed and finds your glove. Then he comes along and asks the doorman at the Rialto if he sees us, and he says no, and the blind man pipes up and tells what he heard us say. Lordy, Peewee, we're cooked. We're going to do time for this, and it's all your fault! You and your lucky signs!"

He stopped, out of breath, and wheeled about to face Peewee. Peewee, oblivious to everything else, was

just in the act of picking a pin up from the floor. He continued to do so, looked up at Biggy, and smiled.

"See a pin and pick it up——" began Peewee.

He went no further, for Biggy forgot all chivalry of size and strength and fell upon him bodily. A few minutes later the jail authorities had led Biggy away to a cell by himself.

"For which," he said to the policeman at his elbow, "I thank you. Me and him has dissolved partnership, just for luck!"



LIFE-TERMER FREED BY CONFESSION.

CLARENCE LEROY McKINNEY, who some five months ago began a life sentence for murder at the Ohio State Penitentiary at Columbus, was recently exonerated by the confession of the guilty man. According to Judge F. Clevenger, the court which sentenced McKinney expects to right the injustice by a formal retrial, at which the life sentence will be annulled.

McKinney, who was a huckster, of Wilmington, Ohio, was convicted, despite his protests of innocence, of the murder of Policeman Emery McCreight on February 14, 1922. In the eyes of the jury he had been unable to furnish a satisfactory alibi.

Louis Vandervoort, son of a wealthy fruit owner of Jamestown, confessed, in the same court where McKinney was sentenced, with the same judge presiding, that he was guilty of the policeman's murder. Vandervoort had been arrested for robbery, and he voluntarily confessed the murder. He was given life imprisonment, and his accomplice, Walter Bangham, a youth of nineteen, pleaded guilty to manslaughter and was given a one-to-twenty-year sentence.

Authorities of Green County, which adjoins Clinton County, where the crime was committed, have been conducting an investigation into statements made by boy friends of Vandervoort that he shot and killed Policeman Elva Matthew, in Xenia, during December, 1922. Vandervoort was implicated in the McCreight murder by friends who declared that he had boasted of his skill with a revolver, saying that the two notches cut in the butt of his gun represented dead policemen.

When Warden Thomas sent for McKinney, he was working in the prison loom mill. He received the warden's announcement with philosophic calm. "I always had a feeling I would get out," he said. "I haven't felt so very bad because I knew I wasn't guilty. I've felt more sorry for my wife and my mother. The humiliation was hard on them."

McKinney's wife, whom he married a short time before he was sentenced, has been working in a Cincinnati restaurant to obtain funds to spend in an effort to free her husband. James W. Reno, arrested with McKinney as an accomplice, but never brought to trial, will be released from the Clinton County jail, where he has been held.

The Gray Phantom's Madness

by
Herman Landon

Author of the "Picaroon" Stories, etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

FOR three years The Gray Phantom has been living quietly at Sea Glimpse, when the father of Helen Hardwick, whom The Phantom adores, is kidnaped. His kidnapers demand ten million dollars for his release. The Phantom comes back to New York and starts in operation a plan to get the money. He sends a letter to each of ten millionaires, asking each for a million. Mr. J. Pendleton Craig is one of them.

Mr. Craig has an uneasy conscience about a shady transaction in Climax Oil stock made some years ago; also about a murder which he thinks no one knows he committed. He goes to Tuckaway Camp, a secluded retreat in Connecticut, for a rest. Here he is murdered, and The Gray Phantom is accused of the crime.

At his headquarters The Phantom, his lieutenant named Wade, and Helen Hardwick are talking over the situation when a signal is flashed to them. Wade springs to his feet and exclaims: "The joint is pinched!"

CHAPTER X.

THE SEARCH.

AGAIN, while no sound was heard in the room, the signal was repeated. In fascination Helen watched the three swift flashes, then turned to where Vanardy had stood only a moment ago. He was gone, and the chair in front of the desk was occupied by Wade.

"Keep cool," he said blandly. "A little thing like a raid doesn't worry The Gray Phantom. This outfit is prepared for anything that may come along."

"But won't they get him?" she questioned excitedly.

"Get The Gray Phantom? Hardly! They tried it before, but luck was against them. Don't worry, Miss Hardwick. The Phantom has had his emergency exit picked out since the day we moved in."

"But what about you and the rest of them?"

"Me and the rest? Why, the cops have nothing on me. I'm the executive

director of Law & Order, Inc., and the others are members of my staff. The police could search this hang-out till their eyes got sore, without finding any evidence. Just sit down and keep cool till the excitement blows over."

There was something infectious about the fat man's serenity, and Helen sat down opposite him, watching him as he rummaged the desk drawers with a methodical air. Her forehead knitted perplexedly.

"You have been hear a month," she pointed out, "and this is the first time you have been disturbed. Wonder what made the police come here this evening?"

Wade chuckled amusedly. "That's an easy one, Miss Hardwick. They know that you and The Phantom are something more than just good friends. You can bet that one of the first things they did after broadcasting a general alarm for The Phantom's arrest was to put a detective on your trail. They expected that sooner or later you would hear from him or get in touch with him

some way. When you came here to-night, the detective followed you. While the three of us were sitting here chatting, the police threw a cordon around the block. Simple, eh?"

"Stupid of me!" fretted Helen. "I might have thought of that."

"You might have, if you hadn't been too excited. But don't you worry. One of The Gray Phantom's favorite stunts is breaking through police cordons. He's done it so many times that——" He paused, looked intently at the door, and struck a more dignified pose. "Now, Miss Hardwick," he went on in businesslike tones, "if you think you would like to try the position, I must ask you a few questions. Your age, please?"

"Twenty-four," said Helen, instantly taking her cue.

Wade cocked an eye approvingly and made a note. "And your address?"

Helen told him.

"Have you had any previous secretarial experience, Miss Hardwick?"

"I have assisted my father in his duties as curator of the anthropological section of the Cosmopolitan Museum."

With a grave air Wade jotted down what she had told him. "I'll have to ask you for two or three references. Merely a formality, you understand. Please give me the names of——"

He broke off and looked up just as the door opened noiselessly. A lean, weary-looking individual in civilian clothes entered the room, followed by three uniformed officers. He cast a mildly amused glance at Helen, then advanced to where the fat man sat, his plump face converted into a vast scowl.

"May I ask the reason for this intrusion?" he demanded pompously.

"Sorry to interrupt," drawled the newcomer, with another sly glance at Helen. "I am Lieutenant Culligore, of police headquarters. I have a warrant for the arrest of Cuthbert Vanardy, alias The Gray Phantom."

Wade gave him an icy, uncomprehending stare. "I fail to see," he declared curtly, "how that justifies your amazing conduct, sir. You did not, by any chance, expect to find The Gray Phantom here?"

"I expected just that," said Culligore, glancing leisurely about the room. "How do you do, Miss Hardwick? Believe we have met before."

Helen gave a scarcely perceptible nod, her mind going back to certain memorable encounters with Lieutenant Culligore in the past. She had learned to understand him well enough not to be deceived by his drawling speech and his habitually lazy eye.

"So you are looking for a job," remarked the lieutenant, squinting at the notes the fat man had been taking. "I heard this gentleman asking you for references just as we walked in. A secretaryship is a bit out of your usual line, eh, Miss Hardwick?"

"One has to try something new occasionally," remarked Helen blandly, looking steadily into his small, muddy eyes.

The lieutenant chuckled dryly. "I came here expecting to find The Gray Phantom, and instead I find you. Queer!" He turned away and passed into the little alcove in front of the dormer window. After contemplating it for a few moments, he summoned two of his uniformed companions, spoke to them in an undertone, and they eased their burly forms through the window frame and started to ascend the fire escape to the roof. The third policeman remained standing at the door.

"This is an outrage!" declared Wade indignantly.

The lieutenant surveyed him with a cool, impudent glance. "Careful," he said softly. "Men of your build sometimes die of apoplexy when they get excited."

Wade drew himself up and gave him

a withering glance, as if meaning to imply that the slur was beneath contempt.

"By the way, Miss Hardwick," and the lieutenant turned to the girl, "have you had any news of your father? I seem to recall that you reported him missing a month or so ago."

"I did," said Helen coldly, "but there has been no news. The police seem to be too busy on wild-goose chases to have any time to search for my father."

"Ouch! That's a cruel dig, Miss Hardwick. Luckily I am not sensitive. The bureau of missing persons down at headquarters has your father's case in charge. Hope he turns up. Fine old gentleman! I've got a different kind of job on my hands. Running down a murderer is no snap."

"The Gray Phantom is no murderer!" declared Helen hotly, scarcely realizing she was speaking until the words were out.

Culligore gave her a long, amused glance. "You seem mighty sure of that. I suppose you will also tell me that he had nothing to do with the letters that were written to Craig?"

"Your insinuations are insulting," said Wade with dignity. "This young lady came here to apply for a position. I cannot have her insulted while she is in my office. If you must inflict this visit upon us, the least I can ask is that you conduct yourself as a gentleman."

The lieutenant chuckled good-humoredly. "I wouldn't have a grouch like yours for the world. Don't fret; you won't have to put up with my company a minute longer than necessary. As soon as I get my hooks into The Phantom I'll be on my way."

"I fear you are exerting yourself in vain," said Wade stiffly. "The man you are looking for is not likely to seek refuge in a place of this kind. Our organization has nothing in common with law-breakers."

"Just the same, I'll bet a pair of pink socks that The Phantom isn't far away. If he attempts to get away across the roof, or if he tries to slide down the wall, he'll have the surprise of his life. We've thrown a net around this block that will prove too tight even for The Phantom."

Helen glanced anxiously at Wade and caught a reassuring wink out of his eyes. The signal passed unnoticed by the lieutenant, who just then was casting exploring glances into the shadowy corners of the room. He looked up as footsteps sounded on the fire escape outside the window. The two policemen dropped down over the sill.

"Not a sign of him, sir," reported one of them.

The lieutenant's forehead furrowed. "You looked carefully, Carson?"

"Me and Clancy made a thorough job of it, sir. We climbed up on the next roof, and the one after that, and went all the way to the end of the block. He was nowhere in sight, sir."

Culligore looked puzzled, and then he glanced at a door in the back. "What's in there?" he demanded.

"My private office," said Wade frigidly. "It is fitted up so I can lie down there occasionally when I feel tired. You are at liberty to search it."

The lieutenant motioned to the two officers, and they entered the room in the rear, but returned shortly with the report that they had discovered nothing.

"Looks as though we'd made a mistake," admitted Culligore glumly. "I'm sorry——"

"Save your apologies," interrupted Wade curtly. "Conduct such as yours is inexcusable. Good night, sir."

Preceded by the uniformed men, Lieutenant Culligore walked to the door. There he turned and looked back at the girl.

"Hope you get the job, Miss Hardwick," was his parting shot. The mo-

ment they were alone, Wade heaved a sigh of profound relief.

"Fooled 'em!" he ejaculated. "They'll keep watch for a day or two, and then they'll give it up as a bad job. They might have known The Phantom would prove too slippery for 'em."

"But where did he go?"

Wade, doffing his dignity, chuckled. "Down a trap door on the third roof to the north. There's a Chinese restaurant on the second floor of that building, and the boss and the proprietor are thick. The old heathen has hiding places, where the cops will never think to look, and all the boss has to do is lie low for a while."

"And then? What will he do when the danger is over?"

"Oh, there'll be other dangers after that. The Phantom will be kept fairly busy."

Helen regarded him soberly. Her face looked tense and white under the shaded lamp.

"What guarantee has he that the kidnapers will release my father even if he complies with their terms?"

"Guarantee? The boss is hardly in a position to demand guarantees. It's the understanding, though, that your father will be set free when The Phantom delivers the last installment of the money. He has to be satisfied with that."

Helen frowned. Her gloved fingers beat a nervous tattoo on the table. "I must stop him!" she declared. "I can't permit him to do such dreadful things for my sake."

Wade leaned over the table and blinked his putty-hued eyes bewilderedly. "Well, I'm jiggered! The boss is risking his neck to get your dad out of the worst pinch a man was ever in, and you tell me you're going to stop him. I never could dope out a woman, and you're the hardest one of 'em all. Look here, Miss Hardwick, one of two things is going to happen. Either

The Phantom pays the kidnapers their price, or your father will be a dead man. Which do you want?"

Helen winced as the alternatives were set before her with brutal emphasis. Her eyes gazed unseeingly across the table, with a look of infinite dread in their depths.

"That's putting the proposition in plain words," said the fat man, "and you seem to need plain words. Which is worse—for The Phantom to pick up a stray million here and there, or letting those slimy reptiles kill your father? Stumped you, didn't I?"

Helen sat as if turned to stone. "There must be another way," she murmured in a thin, anguished tone. "There must!"

"There isn't," said Wade firmly.

"But The Phantom is clever. He has marvelous resources. Surely he can find a way to circumvent the plot."

Wade grunted impatiently. "He could if anybody could. I never yet saw the man who could beat the boss in a fair fight. But these devils don't fight fair. A rattlesnake is a gentleman compared to them. Believe me, if there was a way to beat their game, the boss would have found it."

The intent look in the girl's eyes showed that she was racking her brain. "You mentioned a man named Whipple, who acts as the representative of the kidnaping gang. What does he look like?"

"Thin and brittle, about five feet seven, with a fishy eye, brick-red hair, no chin, snappy dresser, and talks as if his vocal cords needed oiling."

"Does he come here often?"

"Several times a week. He's been trying to hurry the boss up on payments. Why do you ask?"

"For no particular reason. I was just wondering——" She paused and looked pensively into one of the shadowy corners.

"Well, I'm a pretty good mind reader.

You were wondering why, since Whipple is so brittle, I don't put him across my knee and break him in two next time he comes."

"No, not that; but why couldn't he be followed?"

The fat man chuckled grimly. "It isn't quite so simple as that. The gang we're dealing with is too wise to be caught so easily. I won't give you all the harrowing details, but I'll tip you off to one thing. If we tried any tricks on Mr. Whipple, it would mean sure death for a certain old gentleman that you think a lot of."

Helen shuddered; then she reached across the table and, picking up pen and paper, wrote a brief note. After a moment's hesitation she sealed the envelope and addressed it to Vanardy, then handed the letter to Wade.

"Please see that The Gray Phantom gets it as soon as possible," she urged. Wade promised, and she rose to go. The fat man followed her lumberingly to the door and closed it behind her.

"She's a queen!" he mumbled when she was gone. "A queen—but I can't dope her out!"

CHAPTER XI.

PURSUIT.

WIND-BLOWN sleet swirled in the air, stinging her face like a myriad needle points, when Helen emerged from the building and turned toward the little runabout she had left standing at the curb. Her wrist watch showed a little after eight. The lights in windows and at street corners glowed with a dimmed, yellowish sheen through the mist, emphasizing the sense of unreality which the developments of the last hour had stamped on her mind.

Dark thoughts rushed through her head with an aching throb as she took her place at the wheel and started to manipulate the lever with an expert touch. In obedience to traffic regula-

tions, she ran the car to the end of the block, made the turn through a tangle of limousines and taxicabs, and proceeded up the opposite side of the street. Out of the corner of an eye she caught a glimpse of a policeman on the corner, scanning the block with an exaggerated air of apathy. On the opposite corner stood another, and above the buff-colored patrol box behind him was a bulb with a greenish light which signified that the dragnet had been spread for the capture of The Phantom.

At a crawling pace she edged her way through the traffic jam until she came opposite the building she had left a few moments ago, and then a vagrant impression made her glance sharply at the huge, plate-glass front of a restaurant. She caught a meager glimpse of a man seated at a table in the garishly lighted interior, seemingly dawdling over his coffee and cigarette. He sat not far from the window, facing the street and looking out upon it with a curiously intent expression.

She drove on for a few paces, but her impression of the man's face lingered disturbingly in her mind. Where had she seen those hauntingly unpleasant features before? Twice she asked herself the question, and then, abruptly, her own reason supplied the answer. She had never seen the man before, but he had been described to her quite recently. A few phrases of Wade's crude but telling delineation recurred to her: "Fishy eye—brick-red hair—no chin——"

She drew up to the sidewalk and stopped the car with a jolt. Uncertain what to do, but urged on by a half-shaped impulse, she walked toward the restaurant. Out of jumbled thoughts came the realization that it was far past her dinner hour, and that she ought to eat something. In a tremor of excitement she entered the restaurant, sat down a few tables to the rear of the

red-haired man, and told the waiter to bring her tea and toast.

While she ate, she studied the man's back. He was dressed in a rather vivid brown suit. He had a peculiarly shaped head, long, narrow, and triangular, remotely suggesting a gorilla. She wondered why he was loitering in the restaurant. His position hinted that he was keeping the building across the street under surveillance. Perhaps he had come to have a talk with Wade or The Phantom, but had been deterred by the discovery that something unusual was going on and was waiting until the commotion quieted down.

Helen tried to compose herself for a wait. She knew it would be a long one if the red-haired man intended to stay there until the cordon was withdrawn. In all probability he would have to go away and postpone his visit till a more favorable time. In the meantime she was trying to consider calmly the daring resolution that was burning in her mind. Wade had hinted that dreadful things would happen to her father if any attempt were made to interfere with Whipple's movements, but doubtless Wade had exaggerated, being anxious to dissuade her from taking drastic action.

She wished the turmoil in her head would cease, so that she could think clearly. For the immediate present, she told herself, there was nothing to fear. Though her suspense regarding her father was agonizing, it was not likely that any harm would come to him for the time being. As for The Gray Phantom, she relied on Wade's emphatic assurance that he was safe. The dread she felt was of an indefinable but none the less tormenting sort. Her life, ever since The Gray Phantom entered it, had been a constant round of alternating terrors and ecstasies. She had felt herself swept along irresistibly toward some unknown and stupendous destiny. There had been thrills and shivers in

abundance, and she had enjoyed them all. Emotions, at once frightening and exalting, had filled her life to the brim. The exhilaration of it all had gone like wine to her head, and now, in retrospect, it seemed like a delirious dream.

She smiled in remembrance of the mad adventures she had shared with The Gray Phantom. Some day, in accordance with a plan they had often discussed, they would share the great adventure of life. But an odd hesitancy had fallen over The Phantom during these discussions, and once or twice he had confessed himself afraid—afraid of himself. Though the slate had been wiped clean, though he had lived down his past through a series of noble accomplishments, the shadow of other days still hung over him like a great black cloud, projecting a darkening wedge into the future. On occasions he felt the old fever in his blood, and it frightened him. Some day the old temptations might swamp him and drag him down, and he did not wish to drag her with him. And so he had hesitated.

Helen raised her eyes and glanced furtively at the red-haired man, just then in the act of lighting a fresh cigarette. Though she could not see his face, she sensed an emanation of evil from him, a reflection of the sinister influences that had risen to engulf The Gray Phantom's lofty resolutions. A feeling of loathing toward the man at the other table swept over her, coupled with a more sympathetic understanding of The Gray Phantom's motives. Knowing him as well as she did, she could easily see how severely he had been tried. She could not forget that it was his love for her that had goaded The Phantom to one more plunge into the black swirl of the old life. But he had drawn back just in time, on the very edge of the brink. A smile, a trifle bitter, tinged her lips at the thought. His floundering had been caused by the very passion that he had

characterized as the most ennobling influence of his life. Knowing this, she could harbor neither bitterness nor reproaches in her heart, only a dumb, aching dread.

Whipple, the red-haired man, was beginning to show signs of restiveness, and it brought her mind back to her immediate problem. Should she follow him when he left the restaurant, on the chance of learning where her father was being kept? She could not know what Whipple's plans were, but it was possible she would learn something of value by following him. Wade had warned her that it would be dangerous to do so, but she was inclined to believe that he had spoken with her own personal safety in mind, and she was willing to risk that. Besides, there was a restlessness in her that clamored for action. Moreover, in the note she had left with Wade she had urged The Phantom to be true to his promise to her no matter what happened, thus taking upon herself the entire responsibility for her father's safety.

She was still wavering when Whipple rose from the table, forcing her to make a quick decision. She waited until he had paid his check and left the establishment, and then she swallowed her doubts and yielded herself to the blind impulse that had seized her when she first glimpsed the red-haired man in the restaurant. She gained the sidewalk just in time to see him step into the driver's seat of a long, yellow touring car drawn up a little farther down the block, and in a few seconds her spirited little roadster had started in pursuit of him. There was a brisk traffic in the streets, and she had little difficulty keeping the yellow car in sight without attracting the attention of its owner. For a while the course was due north, skirting Central Park; then it veered at an easterly angle and traversed the far-flung purlieus of the Bronx.

Now and then Whipple glanced back

over his shoulder, but Helen, following a block behind, had no reason to suspect that he was aware of pursuit. There were many other cars traveling in the same direction, and her little roadster was inconspicuous. A misgiving began to take shape in her mind as they left the thickly settled portion of the city behind them. The pursuit had been easy so far, but what would happen if, as now seemed probable, it should be extended beyond the city limits, where her roadster would stand slight chance of keeping up with a high-powered touring car, and where also it would be more difficult to keep the yellow car in sight without being noticed by its occupant? She hoped Whipple's destination was not far distant.

The mist and sleet had vanished, and a half-grown moon emerged from behind a bank of clouds. Helen, a vivacious breeze singing in her ears, urged her roadster to greater speed. Far ahead of the yellow car stretched a long, dark ribbon of country road, its macadamized surface smooth as a hardwood floor, lined on either side by clumps of woods and here and there an isolated dwelling. The car ahead was traveling at only a moderate rate of speed, and the pursuit had so far imposed no serious strain on the roadster, but a sense of caution prompted Helen to fall back about fifty yards. On that lonely country road, silvered by the slanting moonlight, she could not afford to risk detection. She wondered anxiously how much farther it was to Whipple's destination.

Then, just as she was hoping that the end of the pursuit was near, the yellow car described a sharp turn and disappeared from sight. She reduced her speed and proceeded cautiously to the point where she had last seen it. A cross-road, narrower and more rugged than the main thoroughfare, stretched up a gently sloping and thickly wooded hill, and at its apex she caught a glimpse

of a tail-light rapidly disappearing from view. For a moment she glanced a trifle dubiously at the black jungle on the top of the hill, and then she started her car in pursuit again, certain now that Whipple had taken this course. Probably, she reflected, his destination was some distance back of the main road. She scanned the darkness ahead of her while the roadster pluckily climbed the incline.

She reached the top and strained her eyes against the gloom for a sign of the yellow car. Then, out of the tangled shrubbery along the roadside, a shadow leaped swiftly to the running-board of the roadster, and a thin, harsh voice ordered her to stop. Instantly she realized she had been tricked in some way, but in the next moment a metallic object pressing firmly against her shoulder scattered all her thoughts.

Instinctively, her mind momentarily dazed by the sudden interruption, she stopped the roadster. A short distance ahead she could distinguish the dim outlines of the yellow car. Its occupant evidently had stopped just below the top of the hill and crawled back along the shrubbery to intercept her. He must have suspected, then, that she was following him, and he had turned off the main road for the sole purpose of verifying his suspicion.

A snicker sounded in her ear, and Whipple sat down beside her. She was gazing straight ahead, trying to gather her wits, but out of the corner of her right eye she caught a glimpse of his unpleasantly leering face. He lowered the weapon he had been pressing against her shoulder and studied her face in the moonlight.

"Quiet, cozy place for a chat," he remarked, speaking in a thick, dry voice that strikingly corresponded with Wade's description. "I suppose you're Miss Hardwick," he added shrewdly.

Helen said nothing. His deduction concerning her identity seemed natural under the circumstances, and, besides,

her picture had frequently appeared in the newspapers in connection with accounts of The Gray Phantom's exploits.

"You've got nerve, all right," he told her in a tone of sneering admiration, "lots of nerve, but not much brains. You wouldn't have tried a fool stunt like this if you'd been wise."

Helen remained silent. It was not the first time her impulsiveness had led her into perilous situations. The lonely roadside, with creeping shadows on all sides, was depressing, but her face showed no fear. She bent her wits to the problem of outmaneuvering the man at her side.

"Thought you'd get a line on your old man, didn't you?" he went on with a derisive chuckle. "It looked easy, I suppose. You thought all you had to do was to get on my tracks and trail me for a while. He! Guess you thought I was easy. Let me tell you something. I spotted you the moment you walked into the restaurant, though I didn't let on. Wanted to see what kind of game you were up to. Didn't that bunch across the street tip you off to what would happen if you tried any tricks with me?"

"Oh, yes," said Helen in a tone of studied indifference, "I was warned, but I didn't pay very close attention. I was given to understand that something dreadful would happen to me if I tried to interfere with your plans."

"To you?" Whipple gave a loud snicker. "Then you didn't get it straight. Nothing very terrible is going to happen to you, dearie. Guess you aren't the kind that's easily scared, anyhow. Everybody knows that The Gray Phantom's moll has nerve. No, something's going to happen, all right, but not to you."

He put an emphasis on the last words that filled Helen with uneasiness. His implication was terrifyingly clear, though the exact details were obscure.

"There's another thing everybody

knows," Whipple went on, "and that is that you're crazy about your old man. Wouldn't want anything to happen to him, would you, dearie? Something will, though, and mighty quick, unless we stop it in a hurry." He took out his watch and held the dial to the moonlight. "Yep, in just about an hour. We haven't much time to waste."

Helen stirred nervously in her seat. The vagueness of Whipple's assertion was more disturbing than plain words would have been.

"What do you mean?" she asked huskily.

"He! Got a rise out of you, didn't I? Want to know just what's going to happen to your old man, eh? Well, The Phantom knows, and so does old fatty. That's why they're mighty careful not to do anything that might make me nervous. Too bad they didn't put you wise. Might have saved you a lot of trouble. I'll give it to you short and sweet, dearie. In just an hour, unless we do something to prevent it, your old man will be headed for a better world. There won't be any rough stuff; he'll just keel over and go to sleep. Nobody is going to lay a hand on him or come near him, even. The thing will happen of itself, without anybody taking a hand in it. All I've got to do is to sit tight right here, having a friendly chat with a nice looker, and in an hour the professor will shuffle off."

Helen shut her lips firmly to stifle an exclamation of horror. Much that he had said was incomprehensible to her, but the very indefiniteness of his statements inspired her with a nameless, tormenting dread. Whipple's shrill laugh broke in on her doleful reflections.

"Don't like the idea, I see. You've got to use your brains when you're bucking The Gray Phantom. The Phantom is a slick bird, but he's up against a tough one this time. I can come and go as I please, and he can't raise a finger against me. If he does,

I'll just laugh in his face and remind him of the pinch the professor is in. If he tries to tag along after me, as you did to-night, I'll just stop and refuse to go any farther, and he knows that unless I get back to a certain place within a given time the professor will be done for. On your account he's mighty anxious about the professor's health. Great little layout, eh, dearie?"

Helen fixed him with a glance of mingled loathing and dread. She understood little except that Whipple and the gang he represented had invented some diabolical arrangement by which her father would be automatically put to death unless something were done to prevent it. Instinctively she moved her gaze to the little watch on her wrist. It pointed to a few minutes after ten.

"It'll come off at eleven," Whipple pointed out. "Eleven sharp. What are you going to do about it? Shall we sit here chatting like two good friends while your old man kicks off, or——"

"No!" cried Helen vehemently. "Not that! I'll do anything——"

"Now you're talking," he interrupted approvingly. "Glad you are going to be reasonable. Tell you what I'll do. I'm not anxious to have the professor go off the hooks just yet. As long as he is alive, we can make The Phantom shell out dough with both fists. If you'll promise to behave nicely, I'll take you to where your old man is, and then you can go back and tell The Phantom and old fatty what you've seen." He laughed craftily. "It will be a good lesson for them if they should be tempted to start something. Promise?"

"Yes—yes!" said Helen, feeling a stifling tightness at the throat. "Only hurry!"

"Oh, I'll hurry, all right. This old boat of yours is too slow. We'll take mine."

Helen acquiesced, conscious only of a burning desire to prevent the dreadful fate at which Whipple had hinted as

being in store for her father. Perhaps a saving inspiration would come to her later, but at present she had no choice except to follow him. She sat down beside him in the yellow car, and she did not protest when he bound her hands behind her back and blindfolded her eyes.

In a moment they were on their way, traveling at a speed that caused the wind to roar like thunder in her ears. They made numerous turns, it evidently being Whipple's intention to confound her sense of direction. As she sat straining forward in her seat, she was conscious of nothing but the rush of wind against her face, and a fervent wish that her companion would drive still faster. Time and locality became hazy quantities in her mind. It seemed as if they had been traveling for hours when at last the car drew up with a jerk.

"Five minutes to eleven," said Whipple as he helped her from the seat and started to conduct her over a rough stretch of ground. As they walked, she was vaguely conscious that the wind had a salty tang and brushed her face with a moist touch. They stopped, and she heard a key squeak in a lock, and then Whipple pushed her forward. A door closed at her back, and she heard her companion fumbling about in the darkness. A vague shimmer penetrating the cloth before her eyes told her that he had switched on a light, and then her eyes were uncovered, but he made no move to release her hands.

"All modern conveniences," he placidly pointed out, indicating a single, unshaded electric light bulb suspended from the ceiling. "There's a town about a third of a mile back of here that supplies us with electricity and gas."

The remark sounded utterly trivial, but somehow she perceived a hidden meaning in it. She was in a state of quivering excitement and saw things through a blur. It was an uninviting place, with murky brick walls and an

accumulation of dilapidated implements stacked along the sides. From the appearance of it, it might have been a fisherman's dwelling long since abandoned.

With maddening deliberation Whipple lighted a cigarette.

"Bet you don't know where you are!" he remarked.

"Where is father?" asked Helen chokingly, looking about her.

He ignored the question. "Great little hiding place! Not more than one chance in a million that anybody will come here. We could keep the professor in this joint for a year, and nobody would ever think of looking for him here."

"But I don't see him."

"You will soon enough. I want to show you the arrangement I explained to The Phantom and old fatty. They haven't seen it, and I want you to go back and give them a description of it. It may induce them to hurry up with the coin. It will have a healthy effect on them to be told what you saw with your own eyes. Look around a bit."

Helen did, but at first she could see nothing out of the ordinary. Then a loud, rhythmic ticking drew her gaze to an alarm clock placed on a shelf along the wall near the ceiling. She saw that the hands pointed to two minutes of eleven, and in an instant the homely appliance took on a sinister significance in her imagination.

"Look closer," said Whipple.

Helen advanced a few steps across the cluttered floor. She saw now that a thin length of wire extended from the back of the clock to the tap of a gas pipe running along the ceiling. She glanced bewilderedly at Whipple, whose face twitched with malevolent enjoyment. He offered no enlightenment, and she looked back at the clock. The minute hand was almost touching eleven.

"Watch now," said Whipple. "I want you to see what would have happened if we hadn't got here in time."

He had barely finished speaking when a shrill, rattling sound began to din in her ears. The alarm was going off, but at first the fact meant nothing to her. Then her gaze shifted from the clock to the wire extending from its back to the gas cock. It had tautened the moment the din started, and now she could see it jerking at the cock, turning it slowly round. Though she still understood nothing, a shudder ran through her at the sight.

"That cock up there turns very easy," Whipple explained. "Just a little pull is enough. Guess what's happening now."

Helen said nothing. She was rendered dumb and motionless by an incomprehensible horror.

"I'll tell you," drawled Whipple. "The pipe you see up there runs into an upstairs room. When the cock is turned, gas flows into that room. The room is almost airtight, and the end of the pipe is in a place that the person who lives in the room can't get at. How long do you suppose he can keep alive?"

A shuddering cry broke from Helen's lips. The diabolical arrangement was hideously clear now. "Stop it!" she exclaimed. "For Heaven's sake——"

"Sure," said Whipple calmly. "That's what I came back to do. Leisurely he swung a rickety chair against the wall, stepped on it, stopped the alarm, and turned the cock back. "You see, dearie, I set the alarm to go off at eleven. I figured I'd be back by that time. I always set it before I go away from here, allowing three or four hours for my return, depending on how long I expect to stay away. If The Phantom and his crew take a notion to follow me, or try any other kind of funny business on me, I just sit tight and laugh at them. They know what will happen if I don't get

back before the alarm goes off. It's the best kind of life insurance for me. Simple but effective. Get the idea, dearie?"

"It's—it's monstrous!" cried Helen.

"Sure thing, but it's the only way to handle The Phantom. He is up against a game this time that he can't beat. He can't find the professor without trailing me, and if he tries to trail me he signs the professor's death warrant. Now, sweetie, you can see your father, but you'll have to cut it short. This way. Careful you don't stumble. Don't forget your hands are tied."

In a corner of the hovel was a dilapidated stairway, and Whipple started to ascend. In a black, despairing mood Helen followed him. On the upper landing he unlocked a door and pushed her into a room. The first thing she noticed was a faint reek of gas in the air. The room was crudely but comfortably furnished, and showed signs of having been rendered habitable in a hurry. Books and magazines were heaped beside the electric lamp on the table. The room was not unoccupied.

At her entrance, a white-haired man sprang from the chair he had occupied. There was a strained look in his face and a startled expression in his eyes as he saw the intruders.

"Dad!" Helen cried, springing forward.

A broken, husky voice answered, and in a moment she felt her father's arms about her neck. All her thoughts were swallowed up in a whirl of emotions, but she managed to whisper a message of cheer in his ear before Whipple drew her impatiently away. She felt an aching void around her as she allowed him to lead her down the stairs.

"Now I'm going to take you back to your car," he announced, picking up the bandage he had removed from her eyes upon their arrival. "Not much danger that you'll ever find this place again. Say, you'll have a lot of things to tell

The Phantom when you see him—eh, dearie?”

His leering face sickened her, and she turned away. “If you dare to mistreat my father——” she began chokingly.

It was impossible to proceed.

“Mistreat him?” he echoed with a laugh. “That’s where you’re wrong, dearie. I bring him three square meals a day and all the reading matter he wants. Now I’ve got to blindfold you, and then——”

He stopped short, his eyes narrowing as they followed the direction of her gaze. Her glance had been roving idly about the downstairs room until suddenly it fixed on an object at the opposite wall. It was an old rowboat that, along with many other discarded articles, had been stored in the place. It leaned against the wall, with the bottom turned out, and it seemed to be in a sadly dilapidated condition. The wood was partly decayed, and the paint had peeled off in spots, but the only thing that caught Helen’s eye was the name painted along the bow. She spelled it out with difficulty. It was *Tuckaway Camp*.

For a moment she stared dazedly at the inscription, and then a whirling tumult in her head made her suddenly faint. She tried to steady herself and not show that she had seen anything. It was at Tuckaway Camp that the murder of J. Pendleton Craig had occurred, the murder of which The Gray Phantom was accused. The realization dazed her, but she made a heroic attempt to look unconcerned. Evidently it had not occurred to Whipple that a clew to the location of the place was in such plain sight. Then a muttered oath sounded at her back, and she knew that she had failed.

“The program’s changed,” said Whipple curtly. “You’re going to stay here. I’m afraid you might tell The Phantom too much.”

She turned and faced her jailer.

CHAPTER XII.

WADE RECEIVES A CALLER.

ON the morning of the third day following the visit of the police to the offices of Law & Order, Inc., Wade was sitting in gloomy meditation at the desk usually occupied by Vanardy. His enforced idleness of the past two days had left him in an irritable mood. Beyond forwarding the note Miss Hardwick had entrusted to him, he had not been in communication with The Gray Phantom, but he supposed the latter was safely hidden in the Chinese restaurant where he had sought refuge in accordance with his prearranged plan, and would return as soon as developments made it safe.

He glared sourly at a little stack of papers on the desk, flung them with a petulant air into the drawer, and just then Melton entered and placed a card before him.

“Mr. Philip Dawson,” read the fat man aloud. “What does he want?”

“He refused to tell me, sir,” said Melton, who had all the earmarks of a hard-working, underpaid clerk, “but he wishes to see you personally.”

Wade grunted, fingered the card disdainfully, but finally consented to receive the caller. It was not prudent to turn visitors away from the establishment without granting them an interview, and he could probably dispose of this one in short order. He leaned back in the chair and, when Mr. Dawson entered, surveyed him with a critical and deceptively indolent eye. The caller appeared to be a man past middle age, with a gray-sprinkled and neatly trimmed beard, and eyes that peered with a near-sighted look through a pair of shell-rimmed lenses. He stooped a little, and somehow Wade gained the impression that he had acquired both the stoop and the near-sighted look through arduous poring over books. His black overcoat and dark trousers

looked somewhat shabby, and his derby had a well-seasoned appearance, yet he carried himself with an air that instantly stamped him as a gentleman.

"I am not intruding?" he asked in dignified, courteous accents that seemed a trifle husky from a recent cold. "I shall take only a few minutes of your time. My name is possibly familiar to you." He smiled apologetically through his well-kept beard. "I have gained a modest reputation as an unofficial criminologist."

"Can't say I've heard of you," said Wade. He was in no mood to bandy the pleasant amenities of life, and he had a deep-rooted and highly uncomplimentary opinion of private criminologists.

"Well, no matter," said the visitor affably. "I merely wished to identify myself as a prelude to stating my business. It has to do with the murder of J. Pendleton Craig."

"Oh, Lord!" the fat man groaned inwardly, anticipating a tedious and amateurish exposition of his caller's opinion of the case. "Really, Mr. Dawson," he said aloud, "that's a matter we are not particularly interested in."

"Then I hope to arouse your interest," said Dawson imperturbably. "Although the crime did not occur within their jurisdiction, I believe the New York police are looking into the matter, owing to the local prominence of the victim, also because the supposed perpetrator of the deed has a long criminal record in this city."

Wade nodded in an acutely bored way.

"I also understand," the irrepressible caller went on, edging his chair a little closer to the desk, "that the police came to these offices the other night expecting to find the suspect here."

"The police are fools!" said Wade undiplomatically.

"Granted." Dawson smiled and rolled his eyes mysteriously. "They

have an astounding capacity for making blunders. In this instance, however, they were not so far off the right track."

Wade regarded him guardedly. His visitor promised to be more interesting than he had anticipated. "What do you mean?"

Dawson leaned toward the desk and spoke in a confidential tone. "I have very good reason to believe that The Gray Phantom was here, seated at this very desk, just before the police arrived the other night."

Wade had an uncomfortable moment. He looked at his caller blankly, noticing the faint, amused flicker behind the shell-rimmed lenses. If the man were a crank, as he appeared to be, he was a most unusual one.

"That's strange talk," the fat man remarked. "Suppose you explain yourself."

"Gladly. I'll go a little further, Mr. Wade. I have information to the effect that The Gray Phantom went direct from this establishment to a Chinese restaurant two doors north of here."

A look of alarm crossed Wade's chubby features. He drew his immense, well-groomed body erect in the chair and stared at his visitor. Suddenly Mr. Dawson laughed outright, and this time the huskiness was gone from his voice. Wade leaned forward, eyes popping, and gave a violent start.

"Holy mackerel!" he exclaimed. "The Gray Phantom!"

"Sorry I frightened you," said Vanardy in his natural voice, "but I wanted to put this new rôle of mine to the test. Since it deceived you, it is likely to deceive others."

"It's a scream," said Wade with conviction. "Some front! Where did you get it, boss?"

"Sing Lee helped me. A new set of togs, a beard, and a pair of spectacles, plus a bit of reasonably competent acting, go a long way. You think I'll pass?"

"With bells on," declared Wade fervently.

"Any news?"

The fat man looked suddenly embarrassed. "Our friend Culligore came back the next morning and did some more nosing around. I think we've thrown him completely off the scent."

"Has Whipple been back?"

"No, he telephoned yesterday that the gang expects an installment of the ransom within two weeks. Blast his ugly mug! Say, wouldn't I like a chance at it with my fists?"

"Maybe your chance will come, Wade. What else?"

Wade shifted uncomfortably in his chair and adjusted his cuffs with ostentatious care. Vanardy gave him a searching glance.

"Out with it, Wade! I can see there's something on your mind. Heard from Miss Hardwick?"

The fat man swallowed hard. "No, but—well, you've got to know it sooner or later, anyhow. A runabout that has been identified as hers was found day before yesterday on a road just across the Connecticut State line."

Save for his fingers, which worked with a slow, twisting motion, Vanardy sat rigidly still. The bearded lips tightened; his eyes, behind the lenses, stabbed like dagger points.

"But that doesn't signify anything," Wade hastened to point out. "It isn't the first time Miss Hardwick has played queer stunts. She probably had a good reason for leaving the car in that place."

Vanardy's chest heaved with a long intake of breath.

"Anyhow," said Wade soothingly, "we know she's safe so far as the kidnapers are concerned. If they meant to play her dirt, they would have done so at the start. They're mighty anxious not to upset you too much. They're wise enough to know that it takes a clear brain to scrape together ten million dollars. You can bank on it, boss, that

they're keeping their paws off Miss Hardwick."

Vanardy nodded slowly, as if impressed by the argument. His face relaxed a trifle. "Hope you are right, Wade. It is strange, though, that she should disappear like that after writing me a note asking me to hold up all my plans for the present. Looks as though she had a scheme of her own on foot. Wonder if——" His brows came up with an expression of great intentness. "Does she know about Whipple's arrangement regarding her father?"

He paused inquiringly.

"I gave her a hint that Whipple mustn't be monkeyed with, but I didn't think it was necessary to go into all the details. Brace up, boss. I'll bet my last dollar that the girl is all right. Say, that front you've got on makes you look like an honorary pall-bearer. Going to a funeral?"

"No, to Tuckaway Camp."

"Tuckaway Camp?" shouted the fat man, almost tumbling out of his chair. "Gone crazy?"

"No, I'm as sane as I have been at any time in the last five weeks. I made up my mind last night."

"But—but——" The fat man choked. "But you're wanted for murder out there. Everybody thinks you bumped Craig off. There was a piece in the paper this morning where some smart reporter figured out that The Gray Phantom is the only man alive who can walk through solid walls, commit a murder, and walk right out again, without leaving a single clew as to how he did it. Better stay away from that joint, boss."

Vanardy smiled faintly. "Thanks for the advice, Wade, but I am going just the same. But don't worry. I shan't go as The Gray Phantom, but as Mr. Philip Dawson, amateur criminologist. Judging from the way you were taken in by my appearance, I think I shall be quite safe."

"But—but why?" stammered Wade, aghast.

"Because I want to try a new tack—a short cut."

Wade gave a disgusted grunt. "Because Miss Hardwick has set her foot down, more likely, and told you not to be naughty any more. Wasn't that what she said in the note she left for you?"

Vanardy evaded the question. "I have several reasons for going, Wade, and one of them I've discovered in the last ten minutes, while talking with you. Doesn't it strike you as odd that Miss Hardwick's car was found on the road to Tuckaway Camp?"

Wade's eyes opened wide; then he shook his head. "It wasn't. It was found on a side road, about half a mile off the main road. And the main road, boss, runs to about a million places besides Tuckaway Camp."

Vanardy nodded. "I know, but something tells me there is a connection somewhere between the murder of Craig and the kidnaping of Mr. Hardwick. I can't get away from the idea that those two events have a common origin, and I am all the more certain of it since you told me this about Miss Hardwick's car. That's why I am going to Tuckaway Camp."

Wade sighed ponderously. "It will be a funeral! I'm sure of it. But, if you've made up your mind to go, a team of oxen couldn't stop you. Let me give you just one tip, boss. Lay off Whipple."

Vanardy made a wry face. "Oh, I have no intention of running afoul of that estimable creature just yet. Some day I hope to settle my score with him, but for the present he has me at a disadvantage. If he calls again, remember there is an ancient and honorable game known as stalling. Well——" He looked at his watch, gave a little catarrhal cough, and got up. In an instant, as he extended his hand, he resumed the dignified and scholarly ap-

pearance that had characterized him when he entered.

"I am indebted to you for a very pleasant chat, Mr. Wade," he said pleasantly, in a tone that was utterly unlike The Gray Phantom's. "Good day, sir."

When he had gone, Wade sat gazing moodily at the door. "It will be a funeral," he lamented. "A funeral!"

CHAPTER XIII.

TUCKAWAY CAMP.

WITH a doleful and long-suffering air, William went to the front door in response to a ring. There had been a constant run of callers since the night of his master's tragic death, and in addition William had been busy superintending the arrangements for closing the house. He moved with a somberness and weariness that were in keeping with the darkened windows and the gloomy halls, and his manner when he faced the caller at the door was distinctly uninviting. With a scowl that triumphed over all his rigid training and all his years of impeccable servitude, he glanced at the card the visitor handed him.

"What do you wish, Mr. Dawson?"

"Is any member of Mr. Craig's family living here at present?"

"No, sir. There's nobody here except myself and two other servants. All the others have left."

"I was under the impression that Mr. Craig had a niece."

"Miss Wayne left for the city Tuesday, sir, immediately after the funeral."

"Unfortunate," murmured the caller. He had an engaging manner, despite his somber attire, and under any other circumstances William would have been favorably impressed. Mr. Dawson showed just the proper degree of solemnity that was to be expected of a stranger calling at a house of tragedy.

"Perhaps you would like to see Mr.

Craig's lawyers, sir?" William suggested. "I'm expecting one of them out to-day."

The stranger shook his head. "No. My business has nothing to do with legal matters. I came here to ask a favor of some one in authority."

"I am in charge of the house at present, sir."

"Ah! And your name?"

"William, sir."

Mr. Dawson seemed to choose his words deliberately. "Now, William, I am sure you were devoted to Mr. Craig, and that you are anxious that his murderer shall be punished. The police, as you know, have not made very great headway so far. Rural officials, as a rule, are not noted for their sagacity. I have established something of a reputation as a private criminal investigator. Will you give me permission to go over the scene of the crime?"

William seemed to regard the request with great disfavor. "It's been gone over a good many times already, sir. The village authorities have been running in and out ever since the murder. Anyway, we all know who committed the crime. The problem is how to catch him. I'd give the rest of my life to see the low-down cur sent to the chair."

His doubled fist added emphasis.

"Your sentiments do you credit, William. It may be that I can help you realize your ambition. I am just as anxious as you can possibly be that Mr. Craig's murderer shall be punished."

William, standing in the doorway and showing no intention to admit the visitor to the house, shook his head with a determined air.

"I don't see that it would do any good, sir. If you will excuse me, I am very busy."

The caller's face changed expression, and then as he regarded the servant with a despondent expression, the light of a vagrant inspiration flitted across his features. His eyes narrowed behind the

thick lenses; there was a look in them denoting one taking a leap into the dark.

"By the way, William," he said carelessly, hiding the intentness of his scrutiny behind an affable smile, "ever hear of a young lady by the name of Miss Helen Hardwick?"

Involuntarily William shrank back a step. A tremor moved quickly across his stolid face, leaving an ashen pallor in its wake. His consternation lasted only a moment, and then he regained control of his twitching muscles and shaking limbs, but the faint gleam in the visitor's eyes told that he had seen enough.

"Miss Helen Hardwick?" William, his voice quite steady, echoed the name slowly, with a wondering expression. "No, I don't think I ever heard of her, sir. Why did you ask?"

"It is rumored she is missing. It is understood that she and The Gray Phantom are intimate friends. If we could find Miss Hardwick, it shouldn't be so hard to find The Phantom. You understand, William?"

The servant's blue eyes scanned the caller's face suspiciously. "It sounds reasonable, but I don't see what led you to think that I knew anything about Miss—what did you say her name was?"

"Hardwick," repeated the caller, repressing a smile. "I did not exactly expect you would be able to tell me anything about her, William. I am merely acting on the assumption that if you keep asking a question often enough you will eventually find some one who can answer it." A shrewd grin parted the caller's bearded lips. "Well, William, I regret that you don't see your way clear to grant the little favor I asked, but I understand your sentiments. Perhaps some other time——"

He paused and looked out over the frozen lawn, sprinkled with oaks and poplars. A car had just drawn up in front of the gate, and now a black-

garbed man, carrying a brief case, came briskly toward the house.

"That's Mr. Stanhope, sir," William remarked. "He's one of Mr. Craig's lawyers. He telephoned that he was coming out to look over Mr. Craig's papers."

The caller waited expectantly. The newcomer was a man well past fifty, long and lean and lithe, and carried himself with military erectness. He wore a fur-lined overcoat whose flaps fluttered sportively in the breeze, and a black derby. A heavy, silver-knobbed cane gave an added touch of dignity to his appearance.

"Hello, William," he said airily. "Hope you have a fire in the library. I expect to be busy for several—— Ah, you have a caller, I see."

"Mr. Dawson, sir," William explained, a faint note of deprecation in his tone. "He tells me he is an investigator of crime and wants to look over the blue room. I told him I couldn't permit it."

The lawyer surveyed the supposititious Mr. Dawson with a gaze that was keen but not unfriendly. Evidently the inspection satisfied him.

"An investigator of crime, eh?" he said, smiling indulgently. His leanly molded face was blue-shaven. He had long, sensitive lips, a firm jaw, a very black, twinkling eye that seemed to plumb and appraise everything at a glance. "Well, why not, William? If Mr. Dawson offers his assistance, I don't see why we should reject it. We want to do everything possible toward apprehending the guilty wretch who murdered Mr. Craig. Show Mr. Dawson up to the blue room, William. After that I want a few words with you in the library."

A trifle reluctantly William complied. As he followed the servant upward through the dim, silent house, it seemed to Vanardy that the lawyer had granted his consent with surprising readiness,

but his mind was full of other thoughts. William's involuntary response to his question concerning Miss Hardwick had been startling. In a few moments of stark bewilderment the servant's expression had betrayed that he knew something about Helen's disappearance, while it had also substantiated Vanardy's hazy suspicion, a matter of intuition rather than reason, that Tuck-away Camp held the solution to more mysteries than one.

William opened a door and stood aside to let him enter. For an instant their eyes met, but the servant's were expressionless, and in another moment he had withdrawn.

Absently, with his thoughts far away, Vanardy walked into the chamber of mystery. An impression came over him that clashed with the blue-tinted ceiling and the cheery aspect of the light-toned walls. He tried to shake it off; for the present he was not particularly interested in the tragedy that had occurred in the room, and which seemed to have left behind it a sinister, depressing breath. The thought that occupied his mind was how he might best take advantage of the discovery, as yet of undetermined scope, he had made when he put his chance question to William.

The air was stuffy, so he parted the shutters and opened the window. A sheer wall, composed partly of glazed, yellowish-brown terra cotta and partly of stone, stretched beneath his eyes for a distance of twenty-five or thirty feet. His range of vision encompassed an uneven, rock-strewn landscape, bordered some three hundred yards away by a rugged shore line, and dotted here and there with clumps of bushes and trees. He swept the landscape, glimmering in the lengthening rays of the afternoon sun, with an idle glance, then turned away from the window. At first unseeingly, his eyes moved over the objects in the room until they paused on a series of chalk marks on the floor.

They extended in an oblong formation between the table in the center and the farther wall. He looked at them uncomprehendingly and without interest until it dawned on him that the investigators of the crime, acting in the approved fashion for detectives, had marked out the spot where the body had been found.

The spell of mystery was creeping over him, finding expression in a flicker of interest in his eyes. The crude chalk marks enabled him to visualize the form that had lain within their boundaries, weirdly silent and still, and his imagination began to sketch pictures of the scene that had been enacted between Craig and his murderer. For a while he could indulge his fancies in that direction without feeling that he was wasting time. Later, as soon as Stanhope had departed, he would attempt to ascertain how much William knew in regard to Helen's whereabouts.

He raised his eyes from the chalk marks and fixed them on an upholstered chair placed beside the table. It was in the seat of that chair, according to the newspaper reports, that Craig had found that grimly worded note in which his murderer expressed the sardonic hope that his victim was enjoying his last night on earth. On the other side of the table was another chair, exactly similar in appearance. It was there Bell had sat when the mysterious missile struck him unconscious. Where had the murderer come from, and how had he managed to make his appearance in such miraculous fashion?

Vanardy's fancies were weaving a web of perplexities, as enthralling as it was inscrutable. He scanned the solid-looking walls and the white, blue-bordered expanse of the ceiling, and the unfathomable quality of the mystery gripped him. So absorbed was he in his speculations that he did not notice that a shadow had fallen across the doorway until he felt the quiet penetration of a

pair of eyes. He turned and saw Stanhope standing at the door, a smile of amusement illuminating his dark, lean features.

"How is the criminal investigator getting on?" he asked pleasantly.

Vanardy awoke from his meditations with a start. He coughed raspily, as if suffering from a bronchial affection.

"You startled me," he confessed in a manner that suited his assumed rôle. "I was just trying to visualize what took place here the night Craig was murdered."

"I should think it would be quite a strain on your imagination. It is easy enough to reconstruct the setting, however. Just imagine that the door is locked and bolted, that the window and the shutters are securely latched, and that you are Harry Bell and I am J. Pendleton Craig. There is your stage all set. What do you make of it?"

Vanardy struck a thoughtful pose. "The setting isn't complete. Craig was murdered at night. I understand there was a fire in the fireplace, and that this light"—indicating the extension lamp on the table—"was burning. I suppose we have to consider all the details to get a complete picture. Nevertheless, the essentials seem to be all here."

"And what's your theory?"

Vanardy smiled apologetically. "It's rather too early to form theories."

"I have reference to the murderer's method of entry. That, of course, is the crux of the case. There is no doubt as to the scoundrel's identity, but the point that puzzles us all is how he got in. I was hoping you could shed some light on that problem, Mr. Dawson. A private investigator, working with a fresh and open mind, sometimes sees things that escape the official eye."

He smiled genially, yet Vanardy detected a faint note of condescension, even of sarcasm, in his manner. As he looked into the lawyer's eyes, deep and oddly penetrating, he felt he was face

to face with a riddle almost as bewildering as the mystery of Craig's death. The impression was fleeting, perhaps only a figment of his imagination, and in the next instant he realized that he must do something to vindicate his pretensions as an investigator of crime.

"Has any one thought of the fireplace as a possible mode of entry?" he inquired, looking at the huge arch of matched rocks, gleaming with mica.

"Oh, yes." The lawyer shrugged. "We have positively eliminated the fireplace from the range of possibilities. Craig and Bell had a fire going the night of the murder, but it had almost burned out when the servants broke in. Even if the murderer could have gotten in that way, his feet would have left marks among the embers and ashes. A careful examination was made, but no such marks were found. No, Mr. Dawson, the murderer did not enter the room by way of the fireplace. Neither could he have entered by the door or window. We have determined by elaborate tests that there are no hidden openings in the floor, walls, or ceiling. I should say it was a physical impossibility for any one to enter the room under the circumstances, and yet we know that some one did."

Vanardy glanced curiously about the room. The lure of the unfathomable was exerting a powerful attraction on his senses. Craig had been murdered in this very room, yet there was no conceivable way in which the murderer could have gained access to it. The riddle seemed unsolvable.

"Couldn't the murderer have concealed himself in the room before Craig and Bell went there for the night?" he suggested.

"Flatly impossible. You may have observed that the room doesn't offer any satisfactory facilities for hiding. Besides, Bell tells me he made a thorough search after the miraculous appearance of the last note."

"You trust Bell?" asked Vanardy pointedly.

"In this instance, yes. He has given a very good account of himself. Bell has his—er—little peculiarities, but I am convinced he is innocent in this case. Tell me, Mr. Dawson, don't you share the generally accepted opinion that the murder was committed by The Gray Phantom?"

As he spoke, the question, in an apparently casual and yet oddly incisive tone, the lawyer bent a gaze full of subtle penetration on Vanardy's face. Without knowing exactly why, the pseudo investigator felt oddly bewildered. He was glad that the shadows had lengthened, partly obscuring his face.

"No, I don't," he declared, speaking slowly, as if carefully deliberating his words. "The Gray Phantom is not a murderer."

The lawyer chuckled deprecatingly. "You disappoint me, Mr. Dawson. You are entitled to your opinion, but your argument isn't very persuasive. The fact that a man has committed no murder in the past doesn't prove that he never will. Haven't you another reason for believing The Phantom innocent?"

Again the question was spoken casually, but Vanardy perceived a subdued tenseness in the tone.

"Yes, I have," he said, "but for the present I would rather not mention it."

For a moment longer Stanhope continued his covert scrutiny, then he laughed. "You private investigators are all alike. You think you have to be mysterious in order to maintain your reputation for sagacity. You interest me, Mr. Dawson. I have several hours' work before me, and I shall ask William to serve dinner about seven. I hope you can remain, and afterward we shall have another little chat."

Vanardy accepted the invitation with thanks. It suited his purpose to stay at Tuckaway Camp a few hours longer,

and there was a tantalizing quality of elusiveness about the lawyer that made him eager to cultivate the acquaintance-ship. Expressing a desire for a walk before dinner, he left Stanhope in the vestibule and went out.

Clouds were massing along the horizon, foreboding a dark night. Vanardy buttoned his overcoat against the sting of the wind and struck a brisk gait, his mind full of the impressions he had gathered in the last hour, uppermost among them being William's peculiar behavior when questioned concerning Helen. It convinced him that the servant knew something regarding the object of his quest. How to make him divulge it was his immediate problem, overshadowing all other concerns, even the mystery of Craig's death. To solve this problem he would have to remain at Tuckaway Camp a while longer, risking the insidious dangers that lay in his path, not the least of which, he felt, was the inscrutable personality of Stanhope, the lawyer.

Instinctively he avoided the neatly arranged walks and struck out along the rugged stretch between the house and the shore line. His thoughts were traveling a twisted course, delving deep into the mysteries that surrounded him, and his concentration was so intense that he stopped with a sharp exclamation of surprise as an interruption came.

Quickly he looked back, peering into the shapeless shadows formed by the trees and shrubs. The wind had died, but in the quiet somewhere in the rear a dim form made a rapid retreating movement to the accompaniment of a snapping twig.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE OLD BOATHOUSE.

CERTAIN that some one had been following him, Vanardy retraced his steps, looking sharply to all sides, but there was no sign of a prowler. The night was darkening, the gloom being

shattered only by a few scattered lights in the windows of Tuckaway Camp. For a few minutes longer he pursued his search, then continued his aimless stroll toward the water front, all his faculties on the alert against an indication of pursuit.

Cautiously he picked his way across the rugged ground, occasionally casting a sharp glance to the sides and the rear. There were no alarming signs anywhere, and he was beginning to ask himself if he had not been mistaken. He was in a state of mental and physical tension, and his imagination might easily have amplified such a simple thing as an animal scurrying for shelter.

The ground sloped gently toward the shore, and along the water's edge was a stretch of white sand. He turned at random, taking a course leading farther away from the house. The tide was just turning, and the dusky expanse of the water was very smooth and still. With no other aim than to be alone with his thoughts, he plodded over the soggy sand, now and then glancing up at the clouds that were slowly spreading across the sky. The wind was rising, sweeping like a gentle whisper over the landscape and scattering the mist over the water.

Vanardy stopped. A short distance inland was a clump of trees, and in their midst he could vaguely discern the outlines of a small building. Having no definite purpose in view, but guided only by a vagrant impulse, he turned toward it. The ground at this point gave him the impression that it had once been a narrow cove which had apparently been filled in for the purpose of straightening the shore line. If so, the building toward which he was headed had probably been used as a boathouse at one time. Owing to the circuitous route he had traveled, he was only a short distance from the residence, whose lights were gleaming feebly among the trees. It was darker here than on the beach, and

he picked his way with difficulty over the rock-strewn ground until he came up against a brick wall.

He found a door, opened it, then stood listening, but no sound of life came from the interior. From his pocket he took a flash light with which he had provided himself before he left the city. Entering, he swung the electric gleam over the floor and the walls. What he saw confirmed his earlier impression that the building had once served as a boathouse. Among other débris was a dilapidated boat, bearing the name *Tuckaway Camp* in scratched and faded letters across its bow. Apparently nothing of interest was to be found in such a place, but an indefinable curiosity urged him in. In a corner he saw a stairway, and in a moment he had started to ascend. His electric torch revealed a door, and it yielded readily to his pressure.

Standing in the doorway, he looked over a commonplace sight. Evidently the little room had once been occupied by a servant of Tuckaway Camp, for there was a bed, a table, and two chairs. The single window was boarded up, and the air was stuffy from lack of ventilation. Vanardy was about to turn back, but a hazy impression made him cast another glance over the apartment. Despite appearances, he had an unaccountable feeling that it had not been vacant long, perhaps only a day or two. Something told him, too, that its former occupant had left it in a hurry. He tried to trace the impression to its source, but just then he heard the door below open and close. For a moment somebody fumbled about downstairs, and then he heard steps ascending the stairs.

Vanardy hesitated as to whether he should extinguish his flash light, but the intruder had already reached the top of the stairs. He turned, and their eyes met. The newcomer's were hard and blue and held a light of cynical amuse-

ment. Vanardy had never seen him before, but he knew instantly who it was. Harry Bell's photograph had appeared several times in the newspapers in connection with accounts of the Craig murder.

"Hello," said Bell, looking him over coolly. "Couldn't you find something more interesting to do than prowling about an old place like this? I'm Harry Bell. Maybe you've heard of me."

Vanardy nodded, as yet uncertain how to construe Bell's intrusion. There was a great deal of insolence in the fellow's manner, but somehow he could not resent it.

"Dinner is ready," Bell announced. "Stanhope asked me to go out and look for you. I'd never have found you if you hadn't left a trail of footprints in the sand along the beach."

"I didn't know you were at Tuckaway Camp," Vanardy remarked.

"Came only twenty minutes ago. Stanhope invited me to stay for dinner." He smiled impudently, at the same time leveling a sustained glance at Vanardy's shell-rimmed spectacles and gray-sprinkled beard. "Stanhope told me your name is Dawson. Funny I never heard of you, since we are in the same profession."

There was a faint sneer in his tone, but still Vanardy felt no resentment. He could see that Bell had keen eyes and was not lacking in imagination, and he wondered how long his assumed rôle would pass muster. For the present Bell evidently regarded him as one of the meddlesome but harmless cranks who flock in the wake of every sensational murder.

"Well, you see, I am only an amateur," he modestly explained. "The case has certain points of interest that attracted me. Are you here in a professional capacity, Bell?"

"Professional? Well, you might call it that. I am here to save the shreds of my reputation." He chuckled cynically.

"Everybody says Harry Bell is crooked, and between you and me they aren't far from right. I've got neither conscience nor principles and wouldn't know what to do with them if I had, but murder—ugh! Don't like anybody to think that Harry Bell is a murderer."

"Does any one think so?"

"Don't you?"

Vanardy did not reply. The thought had occurred to him that Bell might know more of the murder than he had told. Out of his shell-rimmed lenses Vanardy studied this extraordinary individual who, though admitting his lack of moral scruples, professed to have come to Tuckaway Camp to clear his name of suspicion.

"Stumped you, eh?" said Bell sneeringly. "You're too polite to say what you think. I don't like polite people. I prefer plain words even when they sting. Everybody who has had anything to do with this case is too polite. They have a sneaking suspicion that Harry Bell killed Craig, but they don't say so. You're like the rest of them."

"I think you are wrong, Bell. Everybody I have talked with seems convinced that The Gray Phantom committed the murder."

Bell thought for a moment. "Well, maybe he did. That's what I want to find out. If The Phantom did it, he turned the spookiest trick that was ever pulled off. The fact remains that, as far as appearances go, Harry Bell is the only man alive who had a chance to kill Craig. True, isn't it?"

"So it seems—but things aren't always what they seem. It may turn out that another person had an opportunity to commit the murder. In that event

the case against you—if there is a case—would collapse."

Bell gave him a shrewd look. "Something tells me you're a whole lot deeper than you seem, Dawson." He chuckled dryly. "You hit the nail right on the head. If it can be shown that the job could have been done by somebody else, then Harry Bell is cleared. I've come here to show just that." He looked about him in the light of the electric torch. "Not looking for clews in this old place, are you?"

"No, I was just taking a stroll."

Bell gave him another sustained glance, then nodded knowingly. "I was right; you're deeper than you look. Let's go to dinner. I'm starved."

Silently they walked back to the house. Vanardy, remembering his impression that he had been followed on his way out, glanced sharply about him, but he could see no sign of espionage, and in the scowling blackness of the night the scenery had a weird and unreal appearance that dimmed his perceptions. They entered the dining room, where Stanhope was waiting for them, and a twinge of misgiving seized Vanardy as he saw that still another guest had arrived during his absence.

"It seems to be a field day for detectives," the lawyer remarked. "Mr. Dawson, let me introduce Lieutenant Culligore of the New York police department."

Vanardy extended his hand. With an inward quiver, but without a sign of nervousness, he looked for a moment into a pair of slowly twinkling, mouse-colored eyes—eyes that even The Gray Phantom had rarely been able to deceive.

To be continued in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE



Great Escapes

THE STRANGEST OF ALL

By Edgeworth Downer

Author of "Little Adventures in 'Con'," "Embezzlers," etc.

THIS is the story of the most extraordinary criminal and the rarest escape in all the world. Go painfully down the sad long records of all earthly prisons or send the searching eye through all the pages of brain-built romance and you find nothing to outshine the baleful star that ruled the destiny of that obscure young Vermont farmer, Clarence Adams. He belongs with the Cellinis and Casanovas of reality, and the Monte Cristos and Valjeans of fiction. Life and imagination have spawned no finer rascals.

The chronicle of this man does not take us into the mazes and shadows of great cities or plunge us into the dolorous waters of far and fabulous seas. Neither does it lead us into the enigmatic past, beyond the probe of investigation. We need travel no further than the southeastern corner of Vermont, with its somnolent old towns, its high stony hills, and its shut-away populations, drawn, except for the foreigners in the mill towns, from the early stock that penetrated the region in colonial days. The capital of New York State is little more than fifty miles away, and at even lesser distances lie those centers of modern industrialism, the textile towns. Yet here this strange, mad thing happened, and here its extraordinary hero lived and plotted not twenty years ago.

Clarence A. Adams, born to a name as illustrious as any in the annals of New England, was a farmer and the

son of a farmer, having a moderate landed property on the outskirts of the little town of Chester, not far from the Connecticut River in Windsor County. Yet, by virtue of that arrangement of residence peculiar to these New England communities, he was also a townsman and prominent in the civic life of Chester. He had been appraiser, selectman, and member of the legislature, and he was for more than fifteen years the chief trustee of the public library and the person who selected the books for its shelves.

Chester and all the surrounding territory of his narrow little State knew him for a solid, careful, and studious man, who had inherited enough property and money to be fixed for life. He lived on his suburban farm, which was about as far away from the heart of the town as New York's public library is remote from the Pennsylvania Station. Here he superintended the work and submitted to the tender and somewhat intrusive ministrations of an elderly woman housekeeper. He was in town almost every day, sometimes attending meetings and sessions of political bodies, sometimes working at the library, and occasionally running up to Montpelier when the legislature was in session. He was an active man and interested in all that concerned the little community, yet his chief characteristic was bookishness and the love of the lamp.

Not only had he collected in the public library an array of books uncommon

to such repositories, but he had in his home, shelf after shelf of volumes, some of them devoted to strange and mystifying subjects. Something of his character might have been read from the nature of the preponderant collections in his cases, for he had got together the stories of Poe, Stevenson, Hugo, Sue, Dumas, Balzac, Gaboriau, Hoffman, Conan Doyle and many other writers of criminal, detective, and mystery stories. Beside these ranged a patiently acquired list of books on hypnotism, occultism, magic, and necromancy. It was known that he took an almost abnormal interest in these subjects and was forever reading, studying, delving, and collecting, to what end no one knew or suspected. He was merely fascinated, a devotee, an innocent fanatic. No one regarded this absorption in the grotesque and arabesque, as Poe would have said, as anything but a hobby on which a man of substance was surely entitled to ride himself.

Sometimes, it was true, Clarence Adams could be a little annoying. When a store was burglarized or the night prowlers invaded a home and made off with the family plate and jewelry, Adams would be on hand within a day or two, weaving strange theories and applying to these ordinary yet mysterious village thefts all the curious and devious hypotheses he had learned from his reading. But this, too, was passed off as a mere vagary of the student-farmer's. He must have his peculiarities, and since he had his unquestionable virtues these things were tolerated with amusement.

But the burglaries became more and more numerous and annoying as time went on. Beginning about 1885, Chester and several of the close-clustered surrounding towns and villages had been visited at irregular and shortening intervals by night raiders who broke into houses, shops, and factories, held

up pedestrians on the darkened streets, and generally kept the entire neighborhood apprehensive and in tumult. The local police, after their usual formula, had picked up tramps and laggards here and there, and some of these undermen had been packed off to the prison at Windsor, but the burglaries had not ceased. Year after year they seemed to grow in number and mysteriousness till, in the spring of 1902, the whole community was in a ferment and special precautions were being taken on all sides.

One of the chief sufferers by the petty depredations of the undiscoverable marauders was C. H. Waterman, who owned the grist mill and principal feed store. Every little while some one broke into the plant at night and stole a few bags of grain or feed. On one occasion some clothing had been taken, and again some office equipment, mere trifling stuff that might have suggested the presence of some one other than a professional burglar. The mill owner endured these annoyances for years without much grumbling. He was more mystified than anything else, for the method by which the intruder had got into the place was often not to be discovered. Only after careful watching and minute search was it possible to clear up this point. The robber was in the habit of taking the screws out of locks, removing the whole contrivance, getting what he wanted from the mill, and then putting the locks back into place, so carefully, in most instances, that the police looked everywhere but at the lock.

Other merchants and householders were nearly as badly treated and sorely troubled. J. E. Pollard's clothing store was entered from time to time, and a suit or two of ready-made garments went away to a mysterious ownership on each occasion. Finally there was a real burglary, in which half the stock of the store was carted off. As a result

a reward was offered and Adams, as a friend of the merchant, helped to post the signs all about the countryside. A few nights afterward, however, masked men entered the clothing man's residence, held up the family at the points of revolvers, and took all the cash, jewelry, silver, and ornaments in the place. And the offers of added rewards did no good.

Finally, to add a touch of pain, the burglar went back, entered the Waterman mill again, and opened the safe, taking fifteen hundred dollars in cash. Now the mill owner employed a secret watchman, but so long as the man was on duty nothing happened. The miller got tired of paying this man for nothing and dismissed him. The very next night the burglar came again and helped himself to some sacks of feed.

Apparently this criminal or band of criminals was local and in the confidence of the townsmen and their police, for too much intimate knowledge of local affairs had been displayed, and too certain information of the movements of officers and watchmen. The police arrested and examined every one in or near the town who might possibly have seemed a worthy object of suspicions, but no good came of it. The Waterman mill was robbed once more. The whole matter had become too bad a joke.

Old man Waterman set to work on his own plans, and on the night of July 29th, 1902, they bore strange fruit. When the mill owner opened his place of business in the morning he discovered that a spring gun, which he had set to cover the entrance usually used by the intruder, had been discharged and traces of blood near by showed that its charge had found a mark. In so small a community it was not hard to discover the culprit-victim. Imagine the astonishment of the whole population when Clarence Adams, model citizen, public official and trustee of

juvenile morals through his superintendency of the library was found in bed with the charge of Waterman's woodcock shot in his left leg. He was too sorely wounded to be taken to jail at the time, and guards were appointed to watch him day and night. To these he told his story and made his confession, but his housekeeper had robbed him of his thunder when she exclaimed:

"Poor man; it was the books that did it. I knew he'd go daft with his everlastin' readin' an' diggin' in them."

Adams amplified this with an explanation whose psychological interest is not slight. He confessed that he had committed all the burglaries which had annoyed the town for more than fifteen years, and a search of his place disclosed the hiding quarters of many curious objects whose loss their original owners had forgotten. Adams said that he had taken many of these worthless trinkets because there was nothing else that he could carry away conveniently in his pockets.

"I never robbed because I needed money," he went on, "but simply because robbery, and, afterwards, listening to the comments and theories of the people and the police, amused me. It was great sport. I was never amused by the recreations that please most men. I always sought pleasure in some unusual way, and robbing for the fun of it was unusual, wasn't it?"

Adams also admitted that many of the methods he had used had been learned from his reading of criminal tales, and that his constant offering of involved hypotheses to explain his simple burglaries had been part of his curious sport—to exaggerate the stupidity of the police and victims. Asked which of his books had influenced him most, he replied by saying that he had been fascinated by "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde." He had never forgotten it. Indeed, he fancied that he was a dual personality himself, and, if the

meaning of the term be not too strictly applied, he certainly was.

The town gave short shrift to this contradictory man. He was tried less than three weeks after the spring gun had done its work and sentenced to serve ten years in the State prison at Windsor, whither he was immediately transferred.

Clarence Adams reached Windsor and took his place in the prison in the dress of a celebrity, a rare bird, an extravagance. And just here is to be found a complete refutation of the censors, the book slashers, the everlasting busybodies whose chief contention is that certain kinds of literature mislead men into crimes and errors. Every experienced person knows, of course, that few men learn to be criminal from reading, and the proof may be read from the fact that Adams was considered so strange a creature by his convict brothers and by the whole community. Again, it is to be remembered that Adams was a mere dilettant at crime, an amateur, and a tyro. No one took him seriously in the prison. He was set down as peculiar, a crank, and a trifter, but this judgment was no more correct than the average estimate of the learned man at the hands of his practical brothers.

Adams was put to work in the prison library and in the school. He became at once what is termed a model prisoner, and not the least fear of him was entertained by the officials. But Clarence Adams began to plan his escape the day he set foot inside the walls, and he worked on his plans with unrelenting energy, although his labor and his scheme were of so subtle a sort that no one saw or guessed.

The man's problem was a peculiar one. No mere jail break could have availed him anything, even if he had been able to accomplish it, which is doubtful. The prison is a strong one, and Adams was not a member of the

professional criminal world. He would have had no aid from sources that prove invaluable to the usual escaper. However, his problem lay deeper. He was so well known personally all through his State and the surrounding New England territory that he would almost certainly be picked up before he could get far from his prison. His wide acquaintance and the notoriety of his case would certainly handicap him the rest of his life, even if he did manage to get away and stay away. Accordingly, Adams set his mind, saturated as it was with strange lores and love of the bizarre and mysterious, to work on a scheme that would divorce him completely from the past and at the same time carry him out of prison to freedom. He summoned from his memory the things he had read in the pages of the romantics, and he employed them as a criminal, but not to amuse himself in this instance.

Adams had read of the escape of Casanova from the Piombi, in Venice; of the strange flight of the Abbe Comte de Buquoi, from Fort l'Eveque and the Bastille. He remembered his "Monte Cristo," and the sack with its living corpse cast into the waters of the harbor of Marseilles, from the platform of the Chateau d'If, and his "Les Miserables" with the escape of Valjean from the cemetery, whither he had been borne in the coffin of the dead nun. But it was probably Stevenson who suggested to this necromantic reader and strange criminal the course he took, and it was not the account of "Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," but "The Master of Ballantrae," from which the inspiration was drawn.

It is impossible to throw as much light as one would like upon the details of the plot and escape, for the Vermont authorities, actuated by political motives, failed and refused to make the investigations which the case warranted, so that our reliance must be placed upon

circumstantial accounts. Apparently Adams was not at first convinced that he must make some extraordinary severance of his new life from his old, and tried his hand at plotting an ordinary escape. To this end he had an old associate and intimate friend, one William Dunn, visit him repeatedly. The two held long secret conversations, for they were not forbidden by the prison regulations then in force. It developed later that they had discussed means of freeing Adams. But nothing came of these plottings in the end. The prisoner either realized that a mere escape would do him no good, or he was again fascinated by his romanticism and his love of mystery, so that he chose an extravagant adventure for his feat of deliverance.

For the plan he eventually adopted he needed aid both within and without the prison, a fact which may serve to discount the quality of his deed in the eyes of some judges. Outside aid was at hand. The people of Chester knew, though he could nowise be made to confess it, that Adams had not been without accomplices in some of his burglaries. On one occasion four men participated in a holdup, responsibility for which was admitted by Adams after his capture. It was undoubtedly to one or more of these old aides that the convict resorted for outside coöperation, and the students of the escape have generally accepted William Dunn as the go-between, who arranged matters for Adams and guided his confederates in their work.

But more important still was the coöperation of one man in the prison, locked away like the escaper himself to expiate some crime against the people. This man was the prison physician, and Adams came to know him because he was also studious, a lover of books and a constant reader in the library where Adams presided. The reader is probably familiar with the custom of em-

ploying convicts as nurses and sometimes as physicians, in prisons. In the celebrated case of Irving Latimer, at the Michigan prison, this murderer was allowed to act as druggist and managed to escape by poisoning his guards.

The manner in which Adams was to employ the convict physician was, however, much more involved and beyond the range of official suspicion. The only obstacle in the way was the visiting doctor, for the Vermont prison was not wholly dependent on the services of the immured medicus. Doctor John D. Brewster, a local practitioner called at the institution at regular intervals, or was summoned whenever there was special need of his services. Thus, whatever plot the librarian and the imprisoned doctor might form must be subtle enough to circumvent the vigilance of the outside man of medicine. Doctor Brewster was, for instance, required to sign the death certificates of all men who perished inside the walls, and they could not be legally buried without his certification. This was important, for Adams planned to die and be born again.

As early as two hundred years ago the Western world has been generally informed of the claims of East Indian fakirs who are said to be able to induce a hypnotic sleep or virtual suspension of animation, under which they have been buried, left in the earth for varying periods of time, and then been exhumed and restored to life. When we were all much younger, certain theatrical troupes went about the United States with alleged Hindoo wonder workers of this type, and there is hardly a village in the country where this feat has not been demonstrated. Unfortunately the exhibitions were almost invariably proved to be fraudulent, so that the whole body of claims came into disrepute.

At the other extreme of the controversy are the various and numerous

bands of workers in psychism, who have taken up trances, hypnotism, and other phenomena of this kind and worked out of them an exaggerated attitude of credence toward all manner of charlatanry and fraudulent miracle working. In other words, the country seems to be divided between those who believe too little and those who believe far too much. The fact is that a deep sleep, with virtual suspension of the functions of animation, can be induced by hypnotic means. The certain evidence has long ago been gathered by scientific investigators in India and elsewhere, and the most modern psychology understands the workings of hypnotism so clearly that further doubt is needless.

To explain the matter in its simplest terms, hypnotic sleep is allied to normal sleep. In the latter the activity of the body decreases greatly. The action of the heart, respiratory and digestive systems is very much slower and weaker than during the waking hours and, in some individuals, the reduction of breathing and heart action is so great in the early morning hours of deepest slumber that ordinary observation sometimes fails to detect signs of life. Somnambulism, or sleep walking, is a common manifestation of the hypnotic state in sleepers, and perhaps the clearest demonstration of the manner in which the individual may function under the complete control of the unconscious mind.

The skeptic has only to imagine the normal reduction of bodily activities, such as occurs in deepest sleep, still further minimized by conscious or unconscious hypnosis, to understand that virtual suspension of animation which explains the entombment and resurrection of fakirs, shamans, and medicine men among many tribes in various parts of the world. Stepping outside of mere human experience into the habits of lower animals, the hibernation of vari-

ous species gives us a close analogy. Bears dragged from their dens in the deepest winter sleep are found to be in a hypnotic trance so deep that their breathing can hardly be detected, and the awakening of the animal is difficult to accomplish.

Hypnotic insensibility is, as a matter of fact, what is induced by most anæsthetics, and many modern drugs are known in the pharmacopœia as hypnotics. To attack the problem from the other end, surgical operations have repeatedly been performed in India upon natives who administered their own anæsthetics in the form of self-hypnosis. James Esdaile, the eminent and much-condemned British surgeon, performed amputations of shattered legs and arms in the government hospital at Calcutta under such circumstances as early as 1830, and was soundly laughed at for his pains, only to be recognized and honored by a more informed generation.

With all these matters and much more, Clarence Adams was thoroughly familiar, and there is every reason to believe that he had been practicing upon himself for years and trying to induce self-hypnosis. From his large collection of books on the subject he had unquestionably learned that such a condition may be self-induced either purposely or spontaneously. He must have known of the cases of many medieval martyrs and saints who were thrown into these states by their own fervor and emotion, and his reading certainly included the cases of various stigmatics on whose bodies appeared strange scars, approximating the wounds of Jesus. These also are the results of self-hypnotism, plus some mysterious control of the overwrought mind on the tissues of the body—a matter which medical science is not yet ready to make clear.

Suggestive evidence to uphold this explanation of the escape is to be taken from the fact that Adams had many of

his books brought to the prison and added to the library there. Perhaps he wished merely to enlighten the dull clods about him and fill their dark minds with the strange lores and sciences that had so long beguiled him. Those who know the mood of escapers best will judge otherwise. And there is more testimony as to the course Adams' plans were taking in the statements of the prison officials, who reported that he was frequently ill, depressed and abstracted, almost mad. No doubt he was experimenting on himself and making ready for his dreadful adventure.

On the afternoon of Washington's birth anniversary, 1904, Adams reported to Doctor Brewster, who called at the prison that day, that he was suffering from inflammatory rheumatism. The physician ordered him into the hospital and placed him in care of the convict doctor, with instructions as to his treatment. What Adams said to Doctor Brewster on this occasion is suggestive in itself. Though he complained of rheumatism and was sent to the infirmary on that plea, he told the physician that he thought the grip was coming on and that he was not long for this world.

On the following day, the 23d, Adams repeated this dismal prophecy to the deputy warden and still later to the warden himself, but these officials laughed at him and assured him that he'd be "up and about" in a few days, a prophecy that must have made the plotter smile. Despite Adams' complaining no grave symptoms set in either on the 24th or the 25th, and the deputy warden, who was watching the case closely and repeatedly asked the convict doctor for reports, did not think it necessary to send for Doctor Brewster. But at three o'clock on the afternoon of February 26th the prison doctor announced that Adams had died of oedema of the lungs, otherwise pneu-

monia. He made out a death certificate and sent it to Doctor Brewster, together with his report of treatment and examination, and the visiting surgeon promptly signed the document. Evidently he was not suspicious, and why should he have been? The man was either dead or alive. He would have to be dead to get out of the prison gates, and so long as there was no doubt on that score what did it matter whether oedema of the lungs or heart disease were written on the record? It might have struck him that pneumonia rarely kills in three and a half days, especially when there has been no violent symptom even twelve hours before the end, but he probably was busy with his own affairs and did not think it worth while to inquire. On this the conspirators had, of course, counted.

The prison doctor laid out the body personally, washed the corpse, removed it to a slab in a side room, and covered it with sheets and a blanket. No one else had any dealings with the dead Adams, save that the deputy warden came and viewed the body in a perfunctory way and with such haste and squeamishness as may be guessed. Ordinarily one of the convict nurses would have been ordered to perform the last unpleasant offices on the body, but the prison doctor explained that Adams had been his friend and had requested him to treat his corpse in a certain way.

The peculiar incidents began now to multiply. Though Adams was related to scores of persons in Chester and in the prison town of Windsor itself, and though he had named as executor his uncle, Samuel Adams, of Chester, he left a hastily drawn testament in which he willed his body to William Dunn, and gave special instructions that it was to be entrusted to no one else. And Dunn appeared at the prison to take charge of it before it was cold. Word of Adams' death had been sent out, it

was true, but Dunn appeared so promptly that he felt compelled to explain that Adams had sent him word of his illness and approaching death.

Warden Oakes had previously telephoned to relatives of the dead burglar in Chester, asking whether they would come for the body. Having been given a negative answer he felt no hesitation in complying with Dunn's demand, backed by the convict's will. A local undertaker was called, the body was dressed in what is termed a death robe, and laid in a casket. After a brief funeral ceremony it was carried out of the prison, loaded into the undertaker's wagon, and driven twenty-five miles over the hill roads to Cavendish, a small town adjoining Chester, where there was a cemetery and a receiving vault. Into the latter the casket was placed, the plan being to bury it in the spring after the frost was out of the earth. The sexton locked the vault carefully and went his way. That was the end of that strange and inscrutable personality, Clarence Adams.

But the man who had furnished the little town of Chester with the most profound sensation of its history when the spring gun in Waterman's mill pointed conviction against its respectable library trustee, was destined to supply a more ghastly thrill. The casket supposed to contain the body of Adams had not been in its vault more than two months when a well-known traveling man, returning from a trip to Canada, went to the sexton of the cemetery and reported in awed whispers that he had seen and talked to Adams, in Nova Scotia, and that Adams had vowed to return and give the people of Chester something "worth while talking about." The sexton reported what he had been told, and the chief men of the town called the drummer before them and subjected him to questioning. There could be no question about the identification, he maintained, for he had

not only seen Adams but had a long conversation with him.

As a result of this report and of other rumors that reached Chester, Samuel Adams, the executor of the dead man's will and trustee of his estate, commanded the sexton to open the casket before burial and make sure that the body was inside. This the sexton did, but he was unable to make a positive identification of the corpse after two months. There was a body in the casket, beyond question, and it was that of a man who bore some outward resemblance to Adams, but the death-growth of beard had partly obscured the face and slow decomposition had done the rest, so that no man could have been certain without more detailed examination. This the sexton did not make. He seems merely to have peeped hastily under the lid, seen the ruined face of what had once been a man, and dropped the coffin quickly into the prepared grave in the Adams cemetery plot.

The statement of the sexton stilled the rumors for a time, but a few months later the mysterious Adams was again seen in Canada and the report of his presence in the flesh, brought back to Vermont, started a fresh tremor in the veins of the people of Chester. The result was a demand for a State investigation, including an inquiry into the conduct of the prison and the happenings just before Adams' reputed death. At the same time the newspapers set up a hue and cry for the exhumation of the body, and strongly urged upon Adams' executor the advisability of making the examination to set all rumors at rest. For a few days or weeks this agitation continued, and it was apparently certain that both courses of inquiry would be pursued. Then, through the activity of mysterious powers, the Adams story dropped suddenly out of the newspapers, the talk of a State commission ceased, and the

relatives of Adams refused permission to have the body taken from the earth. Writers for metropolitan newspapers who went to Vermont to clear up the mystery found themselves balked at every turn. Vermont had decided that it wanted no investigation, and none was made. Even the open charge that there was a plot to conceal irregularities and possible bribery at the prison failed to get a response, and the whole thing ended in a dark impasse.

The curious investigator who is drawn to Chester and Windsor to-day finds these little communities still divided between credence and scoffing. There are those who believe passionately that Adams contrived his escape and is still living in some out-of-the-way place, and there are others who maintain with what may be a suspicious vehemence that the whole story was a canard, and that such things as Adams is supposed to have accomplished belong to the region of fairy tales. The bulk of the population, however, remains unsatisfied and inclined to the belief that there was something in the many reports of Adams' survival and his presence here and there in Canada and later in the West.

Some time ago an associate of the writer who has a large acquaintance in the criminal world and the confidence of many ex-convicts, was summering in Vermont and naturally heard the story of Clarence Adams. He amused himself by making numerous inquiries among the local people and among ex-convicts. Eventually he found an old prisoner who had been confined at Windsor at the time of Adams' supposed death and got from him the prison version of the affair. According to this man, whose story was very circumstantial and given in great detail, Adams used a sum of money, said to have been three thousand dollars, to aid him in his plot. This sum is said to have been brought to the prison in cash

by one of the burglar's intimates and turned over to the convict doctor, who was the chief conspirator. But the truth or falseness of this detail is not of so great concern as are the detailed account of the "death" and escape.

Adams, according to the prison story, was actually able to induce hypnotic suspension of animation in himself and talked at great length on the subject with the convict doctor and with another intimate of his inside the walls. He made experiments on these friends and on himself, and the three were constantly reading books on the subject which Adams had brought from his library in Chester. He worked on himself for more than a year previous to the escape and repeatedly threw himself into states of suspension, from which the convict doctor roused him after short intervals. Finally, after he had made the experiment many times and gradually got himself into a physical and mental state to risk a longer sleep, he simulated illness, was admitted to the hospital and, after allowing a few days to elapse, put himself to sleep by hypnosis and was pronounced dead by his confederate.

The convict doctor now barred every one else from touching or approaching the body and personally prepared it for the ordeal of deathlike sleep. He stopped the ears in the manner usual with undertakers, and he apparently filled the nasal passages with cotton, but this was done in such a way that the passage of air was not greatly hindered and the slumbering Adams was thus able to do the almost imperceptible breathing necessary under a hypnotic trance. In this condition he was placed in the coffin and driven to Cavendish, where he was locked into the receiving vault.

To cover this point the plotters had calculated carefully. They knew and Adams had told them, warned by his reading of Stevenson, that great cold is

likely to prove fatal to experimenters with this death sleep. Accordingly it would have been better to make the escape in the summer, but they were faced with the necessity of permitting the body to be buried if death came in the warm season. On the other hand, if Adams were to die in the middle of the bitter New England winter his body would undoubtedly be placed in the vault, whence it might be rescued at the proper time without the need of secret exhumation or the risk of temporary burial. So the month of February was chosen for the escape.

The cemetery at Cavendish is a remote and quiet plot of ground, lying in the shadow of the hills and masked by trees. In winter no visitors brave the low temperatures to make pilgrimages to the mounds of their dead, and it is a simple matter to know in advance when a body is to be brought to the vault. So the outside confederates of Adams had a clear field for action of which they took advantage.

The body was taken to Cavendish, locked into the vault and subjected to no watching. The next night the aides of the sleeper appeared and took off the vault locks with a screw driver, exactly as Adams had done in burglarizing the Waterman mill. They entered the place, opened the coffin, and revived their daring brother, who was supplied with clothing and food, and carried overland to a remote railway station, and aided to get to Canada in disguise. In Canada the man lived quietly until he was discovered, when he moved his residence, only to again encounter those who knew him. Eventually he went West and settled down on a ranch. Later still he is said to have drifted

down into Mexico and there all trace of him was lost.

The matter of the body found in the casket when the sexton opened it before interment was explained readily enough. The town of Hanover, N. H., the seat of Dartmouth College, is only sixteen miles distant from Windsor and the scene of these strange incidents. Cadavers for use in the medical school are necessarily being procured and taken to Dartmouth from time to time, for the use of the students and instructors. It was, the old convict said, no difficult matter to procure a body from those who supplied them to the college and transport it to the lonely cemetery at Cavendish, where it was placed in the coffin which Adams had quitted a few minutes before. Adams' confederates had balked at this part of the scheme, the old convict said, but the hero of the adventure insisted that an examination might be made and that a body would have to be in the casket to convince the neighbors that the strange burglar of Chester was indeed dead and in his grave. The ex-prisoner also pointed out that those who aided the burglar in his escape from prison would naturally have insisted on the precaution of a substitute body, to protect them in case there was some betrayal and an inquiry.

Apparently, then, Clarence Adams put his reading of Stevenson's strange story into the dress of reality and, unlike James Durriseer, the hero of the romance, he survived the experiment and escaped from his enemies. So his delving in curious lores and mysterious profundities had got him into prison and taken him out again. I know of no more extraordinary and fantastic story of escape.



The Empty House

& John Laurence

Author of "The Great Safe Mystery," etc.

SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

THE finding of Solly Lazar's dead body in the house of Robert Usherwood leads the police to connect the crime with the loss of the Linkram jewels. No trace of the gems had ever been found, but Lazar, Morris Cortland, and James Easthope had been sent to prison for the crime.

Usherwood, who lives with his nephew and niece, Tony and Sheila Usherwood, disappears on one of his mysterious visits which he is accustomed to make. Before he leaves he gives Barbara Tenterton, Tony's particular friend, a package to keep for him. Tony and Barbara—familiarily known as Bay—discover that the package contains a collection of valuable jewels. Mrs. Catnach, Bay's landlady, finds a bracelet and tries to pawn it. This leads Detective Edwards and Lieutenant Maxwell, who have charge of the case to the discovery that it is one of the Linkram pieces. Tony puts the jewels in his uncle's safe, and that night the gems disappear.

Some nights later the house is again entered by a robber, who blackjacks Maxwell. Later the lieutenant and Detective Edwards discover that Robert Usherwood holds a lease on the house next door, which is apparently empty, and they find a secret passage between the two houses in the cellar. The police are inclined to believe that Usherwood must be the thief as well as the killer of Lazar, but no trace of him can be found.

Then, in answer to Tony's ad in a paper, Bay goes to meet a messenger who is to take her to Robert Usherwood. Tony follows Bay as a shadow. He sees her disappear into a house with a well-dressed man, and presently the man accosts Tony and tells him that Tony's uncle wants to see him, too. No sooner does Tony enter the house than he is overpowered, and he and Bay are held prisoners by the well-dressed man, who has a fellow creek by the name of Jim. Both question Tony and Bay to learn the whereabouts of the jewels.

CHAPTER XII.

"CORTLAND AGAIN."

A MINUTE or two later Anthony, gagged and helpless, found himself sitting face to face with the woman he loved, who was in an exactly similar plight. With strained ears he listened to the descending footsteps of the two men, and a few minutes later he heard the front door slam. The horrifying thought came over him that he and Barbara were to be left there to starve to death, and a cold sweat broke over him. His eyes roved round the room. It was a cheaply furnished bedroom, but it had the appearance of being little used. And then there came to him a wild idea of escape. Barbara's hands, like his own, were free, though so firmly tied at the wrists that it was impossible to part them. Though both were helplessly trussed, they had both been only

propped up in their chairs. If they could only reach one another they could make use of their hands. Without any hesitation he rolled out of his chair and fell on the floor, where he lay for a fearful moment, listening and wondering if his fall had been heard. Then painfully, slowly he rolled along the floor till he was by her feet, and his hands began laboriously to untie the knots at her ankles.

In ten minutes her feet were free, and Barbara was able to stand up. She knelt beside Tony and brought her fastened wrists close to his hands. Quickly his ears strained for every sound as Anthony unfastened the cords which bound her, and Barbara took the gag from her own mouth. The relief was tremendous.

"Oh, Tony, Tony, my dear, thank God!" she whispered, as she bent over him and with feverish fingers released him from his bonds. And the tones of

her voice and the tears in her eyes brought a great glow to his heart.

"Free!"

Painfully Anthony struggled to his feet. Not a sound had come from the house, and the two stood there, listening fearfully before they spoke, stood there holding hands like a pair of frightened children. And it was in a very husky voice that Anthony spoke. The courage that had oozed out of him times without number, when he had looked into those brown eyes, now remained, as he drew her suddenly to him in the face of their common danger.

"Bay, Bay, my darling," he whispered. "If—if we get away, will you marry me?"

And in those soft brown eyes, which looked so bravely into his, he read the heaven of the future, and the present was lost for the moment, as he clasped her tenderly in his arms. The romance of youth held them and threw round the grim realities of their situation a glamour which made them forget.

"Oh, Tony, my dear," she said softly, as he kissed her, "you should never have followed me. They wouldn't have hurt me, really."

"The devils!" whispered Tony angrily. "And, my darling, thank God I did follow. Why," he smiled cheerfully, "I should never have had the courage to propose to you otherwise! Tell me what happened to you, and then we'll look round and see how we can get out. That door's locked, unfortunately, and the windows are four flights up. There's no escape that way."

Barbara Tenterton clung to Tony. Her world had seemed to have dropped from under her such a little while ago, and now—well, what did the world matter now? What did it matter that the other side of that door might shatter everything? She was this side of the door now, and it was this side that mattered, for on it stood Tony, and Tony was the world! Neither thought then

of the incongruity of the opening of their romance.

The story Barbara had to tell Tony was a very simple one.

"He asked me at once if I had told the police," she said, slipping her hand into his. "And he explained that your uncle was afraid his hiding place would be known, if I had, because they would follow me. I told him I had of course shown you and Sheila the letter. He talked all the way about your uncle, Tony, and seemed to know quite a lot about him. He said he would explain everything when I saw him and the reasons for his silence, and I never thought there was the slightest danger. He even warned me, as we were going along the street, that the place where Mr. Usherwood was hiding wasn't a very nice neighborhood, and he asked me if I wasn't afraid to go there. Of course, I wanted to see your uncle so much that nothing he could have said would have stopped me. I didn't think there was anything wrong till I got in the house, and, as soon as I entered, those two seized me and tied me so I couldn't move. They brought me into this room and then went out again immediately."

"That was to get me," said Tony gloomily. "And like a chump I walked straight into the trap. He's got about the coolest nerve of any man I've ever heard of, because he actually pointed out a policeman and hinted that was the real reason for uncle's secrecy."

"Then they came back and asked me where the jewels were, and where Mr. Usherwood was, and I refused to answer," continued Barbara. "He kept on asking the same questions over and over again, but I wouldn't give in."

Anthony squeezed her hand.

"By Jove, Bay, I must say the people in this neighborhood have as good an eye for furniture as a blind tom cat, and as much nose for cleanliness as a sewer rat. I hope their locks are as rickety as some of the furniture."

But though the lock of the bedroom was quite a simple one, it held firmly, for the reason that he could get no purchase with which to exert his strength to smash it. The door opened in, and so effectively prevented any sudden onslaught on it from the inside.

"Haven't you got a penknife with you, Tony?" asked Bay, after watching her lover get red in the face with his exertions. "You could take the screws out then."

"That's what education does for a woman!" cried Anthony, grinning cheerfully. "Just like me to try to smash the lock instead of taking it off the door."

And though ultimately he broke both blades of his knife and cut his fingers, as a broken blade suddenly refused to act as a screw driver and closed across his knuckles, he managed to work two of the holding screws loose. Then it was easy to wrench off the lock, and the door swung open.

"Listen," he whispered. "If there's any trouble, try to get out of the house at all costs. Never mind what's happening to me. Get the police. Those devils won't hang about if they know you've escaped."

He looked round the room and picked up one of the rickety chairs. Jamming it in the iron bed rail he broke off one of the legs.

"Not much of a weapon, but better than nothing," he remarked gayly. "Now, kiss me, Bay! Heigh-ho for adventure! What a room to start a romance!"

Despite the cheerful way he spoke, Anthony was inwardly feeling very much the reverse. Adventure was all very fine in books, he reflected, where the lady of one's heart sees the hero fight his way against fearful odds to freedom, but it struck him as a much overrated occupation at the present moment, even for youth. But there was one thing which made him eager to go

through with this adventure, and that was the remembrance of the way Jim had twisted Barbara's arm to make her speak. For himself he hoped that he would have the chance for which he longed, to pay that back with interest. On the other hand, for Barbara's sake he wished that they could get out of the house without seeing any one.

It was now dusk, and though in the little bedroom they could still faintly see, on the landing outside it was almost black. Hardly breathing they stood there and listened, but the only sound they seemed to hear was the beating of their own hearts.

"Remember, run if necessary," whispered Tony, and taking her hand in his he crept stealthily forward and slowly moved in the darkness down the stairs. Every creaking board seemed like a pistol shot through the stillness and stopped them, listening. But the longest stairway has an end, and when at last Tony found himself in the hallway and saw the reflection of a street lamp shining through the transom, he gave a sigh of relief.

"Safe, my dear," he began.

And then without warning there came the rattle of a key in the lock of the front door.

"Quick," he broke off. "In that door! Lock it and get out through the window."

He gave Barbara a wild push and pulled the door to after her, as the front door opened and closed again.

"Matches, Jim," he heard a voice say.

As the light flared up, he moved quickly forward and struck the hand holding it a smashing blow with the chair leg he was still carrying, and then he swung round and struck where he had seen the big man standing in the momentary light.

But the other was quicker than Anthony. He was a man accustomed to being in tight corners and getting out

of them. As the blow had descended on the wrist of the man called Jim, he had moved swiftly, silently, and Anthony was gripped from behind and held firmly.

"Stop your cursing, Jim, you fool," cried Tony's captor. "I've got him. Strike a light."

To the accompaniment of a string of abuse a second match was struck, and Anthony, struggling fiercely in the remorseless grip of the man behind, saw the brutal face of the other glaring at him.

"Knock him out, you fool!" cried the big man sharply. "Where's the woman?"

They were the last words Anthony heard, and his last thoughts were those of exultation that he had at the very last minute outwitted the men who had hurt the woman he loved.

Barbara Tenterton had not hesitated, as Tony had pushed her into the room. She acted quickly and resolutely, for she felt that upon her now depended not only her own safety, but that of Anthony. And she knew that it would not take long for those two to discover that she also was free. The door which she had locked behind her would only be a temporary barrier, and she ran at once to the window which looked out upon the deserted street.

As she climbed out onto the window sill, she shuddered, as she saw that she was looking down into an area. For a moment she hung from the sill and then, shutting her eyes, dropped into the dark shadow. She could not see the ground below, and the hard cement seemed to meet her with stunning force, as she fell and rolled over. She could hear no sound from the house from which she had escaped, as she picked herself up, and with a little sob of thankfulness she ran up the area steps and into the street.

Though she passed a number of people who eyed her curiously, as she ran

by hatless, her hair tumbling down, she was too fearful of the neighborhood to speak to them, and it was not until she had come into the lights of a main thoroughfare that she saw the friendly blue uniform which was her goal. Breathlessly she poured out her story, and a little crowd gathered.

"Oh, come, come quickly," she cried, wringing her hands. "They might be murdering him."

The policeman signaled to a comrade on the other side of the road, and the three, followed by the inevitable crowd which seems to gather from nowhere in a city at all times, were soon standing outside the house in which Tony was a prisoner. After their first thundering knocking, which brought out a medley of tousled heads from hurriedly flung-up windows, the two heavily built policemen hurled themselves bodily at the door. Once, twice, thrice the lock held, and then with a splintering crash it gave way, and the two men stumbled inside.

"Whistle for assistance, Bill, while I have a look round," said one, turning his electric torch along the hall. "You wait here, lady."

Fearfully Barbara listened to the sound of the footsteps of the policeman, heard him enter one room after another, while beside her his comrade was blowing the short and long blasts on his whistle, the call for assistance. And before that assistance had arrived her heart felt as though it had been broken, for the policeman had returned and reported that the house was empty. Nor did the closest search afterward reveal any more signs of Anthony and his two captors. The ropes on the floor of the bedroom and the broken lock and chair were the only silent witnesses of the truth of Barbara's story.

"They must have got out at the back and might be a mile away by now," remarked one of the policemen. "There are a dozen houses at the back there,

filled with suspicious people. It would take us all night to search them, even if we had the warrants."

Bitterly Barbara reproached herself for doing exactly the most sensible thing she could have done. But her escape had brought about her sweetheart's capture, and in the first few minutes of her despair nothing seemed to her to atone for that.

"Come, cheer up, lady," said a kindly policeman soothingly, as she sat on a chair, sobbing in her distress. "We'll find them soon enough, perhaps sooner than you think. You come along to the station and tell the captain all about it."

The captain listened with a phlegmatic air until Barbara mentioned the name of Anthony.

"Anthony Usherwood, miss?" he interrupted quickly. "Isn't he the nephew of Robert Usherwood, who's disappeared?"

"Yes, yes," replied Barbara tearfully. "I'm sure that's why they've taken him. I went to that dreadful house because I got a message which I thought was from Robert Usherwood."

"Wait a minute, miss; that alters things," said the captain. "I'd better get in touch with headquarters at once."

And before Barbara had finished her story, headquarters, in the shape of Detective Edwards and Detective Sergeant John Maxwell had arrived. And that night a dozen plain-clothes men were making inquiries in the slums for news of Anthony and his captors.

"Hardly much use asking you if you'd know them again, Miss Tenterton," said the sergeant. "But I've got some photographs here. Perhaps you might recognize one of them."

Barbara had no need to look twice at one of the photographs the detective held out to her.

"That's one of them—the big man," she cried excitedly. "The photograph of the other is not here."

With a grim smile of triumph the sergeant—

geant passed the photograph over to Detective Edwards.

"Cortland again," he said quietly.

CHAPTER XIII.

SERGEANT MAXWELL GOES TO RYE.

UNDER the care of a stolid, but fatherly, policeman Barbara Tenterton was driven tearfully back to her home.

"Cheer up, Miss Tenterton," cried Sergeant Maxwell, as he saw her into the taxicab. "And tell Miss Usherwood she is not to worry. I shall do my best to find her brother as quickly as possible. That man hasn't taken him away without a strong reason, and you can be sure that that reason is not to harm him. If he had wanted to do that he had plenty of opportunity to do so before we appeared on the scene."

"Oh, do find him, Mr. Maxwell," she implored, wringing her hands. "We shan't have any rest until you do. And we shall be all alone in that dreadful house now. I dread stopping there."

"You'll be all right to-night at any rate, Miss Tenterton," the detective assured her. "I'll make arrangements for one of our men to be on duty inside the house all night, and there will be some one on the watch outside as well. Tomorrow we can make arrangements for you to stay somewhere else, if necessary. Tell Miss Usherwood I will call round in the morning, and I hope I shall have some good news for you both."

"Cortland again," he repeated to Detective Edwards when he reëntered the station. "Whenever anything happens nowadays, it seems as though Cortland is behind it. But now from Miss Tenterton we have got at the real motive for his eagerness to get into Robert Usherwood's house—the Linkram jewels."

"I am beginning to see daylight now, I think, Maxwell. Cortland and his pals have quarreled over the booty. The

first result of the quarrel was the murder of one pal, and the second result was the burglary of the house of another. You can be pretty certain that either Usherwood or Easthope has got those jewels now, and Cortland won't give them any peace until he gets hold of them."

"But why should Cortland gum up the works with young Usherwood?" demanded the sergeant. "It makes it ten times more difficult for him to get away, and he must be perfectly well aware by now that those three young people know no more about the jewels than we do."

Edwards reflected for a few minutes before replying.

"I don't quite see the point of that, Maxwell," he said at last. "Unless he thinks it will be a hold over Usherwood. He might threaten to kill the nephew unless the jewels were handed over, and from what we have seen of Cortland I don't doubt that he is perfectly capable of carrying out his threats."

"And it strikes me," responded the sergeant, "that Cortland won't find it quite so easy to bluff Usherwood as he expects. A man who's gone to all the trouble Usherwood has to get the jewels, is not likely to hand them over without a fight."

"I'd very much like to know how he got hold of the jewels," mused Edwards, "and where they have been hidden all the years Cortland has been in prison."

"Gee, I believe you have given me an idea," suddenly interposed the other. "If Usherwood, or Easthope, or Solly Lazar had known where the jewels were all the time, they wouldn't have waited till Cortland came out of prison before getting away with them. Don't you see, it was just because they didn't know, that they made all those preparations when he came out. It strikes me that he'd double crossed the others at the time of the robbery, and now they

have managed to get the jewels away from him."

"That sounds probable," agreed Edwards, "and certainly accounts for the fact that none of this trouble started until Cortland had been released."

The sergeant sat silent for a little while and then said quietly: "Can I have a free hand? I've got an idea I'd like to work out, and it may take me out of town."

Edwards nodded.

"I don't mind if it takes you to the north pole, Maxwell," he answered with a smile, "provided you get hold of those men. We shall have the papers shouting loud enough, now that young Usherwood has been kidnaped right under our very noses."

"Then I'll clear out and get some sleep," continued the sergeant. "I'm in for a long day to-morrow."

Before retiring Maxwell made certain preparations. One was to consult a State map, particularly the neighborhood within sixty miles of the city. Another was to make a careful list of the trains, and a third was to pack as though he had the intention of being away some days.

He was up early the following morning, and before half past eight was down at headquarters and had called for the file of the Linkram jewel case and a complete set of newspaper cuttings of the trial. Carefully he read the police dossier through and followed it up by reading the trial, and from both he made a number of notes. Before he left he arranged for a series of inquiries to be made, so that he could have the information on his return.

"I want to find out," he said to Detective Edwards, "whether Cortland, Easthope, and Lazar received any visitors while they were waiting their trial, and if any persons came to see them immediately after they were sentenced, before being transferred to serve their sentences. If a record has been kept, an-

other thing I should like to know is to whom they wrote while they were in prison, or from whom they received letters. It might throw some clew on the hiding places of Easthope and Cortland, because I don't suppose either foresaw all this trouble. Any addresses now might prove useful, and we haven't got any."

Edwards nodded his agreement.

"That's certainly an idea worth following up, Maxwell, and I'll have it put in hand at once," he said. "I expect you'll find the address you'll get is Burton Street, certainly as far as Easthope is concerned. Meanwhile you'll leave me some address where I can reach you," he added with a quizzical smile.

"Rye police station will find me," replied Maxwell. "I'm not certain where I am going to put up."

"Rye?" queried Edwards, and then a sudden light came into his eyes. "Oh, I see you are going to make inquiries round Linkram's place."

"Thought I'd start from the beginning again," returned Sergeant Maxwell. "I've been over the whole case again this morning, and I'd like to ask Mr. Linkram a few questions about Easthope. He made a funny statement in the witness box. It struck me he was keeping his mouth shut about something or other, and if I can find that out, it might lead to getting at him."

"Well, the whole thing's such a puzzle that I think perhaps you are right starting all over again. You may pick up something which I overlooked or didn't think important at the time," said Edwards. "I'll phone Rye if there are any important developments at this end."

Before going to Rye, however, Maxwell called on Barbara Tenterton, as he had promised he would do. There was no need to be told that both she and Sheila Usherwood had passed a sleepless night. Their eyes were heavy with the tears they had shed, and, though both made brave efforts to con-

trol their feelings, the quivering of their lips and their anxious looks told Maxwell they were very near the breaking point.

"Come now," he cried cheerfully. "You mustn't go on worrying like this. Worry will never get you anywhere. Why, if I worried like that, Miss Usherwood, I should never do anything."

"You haven't lost your uncle and your brother, Mr. Maxwell," she smiled faintly. "Do you think we should be sitting here if we could do anything?"

"That's just why I came round to see if you could do anything, Miss Usherwood," returned the sergeant quietly. "A woman thinks on different lines from a man, and perhaps you can tell us some little thing about your uncle which may prove useful. I am sure that he is the one man who can clear up this mystery."

"There's nothing," replied Sheila. "I've thought over and over again, and can't think of anything out of the ordinary. He was in a way secretive—that is, he never told us his business, or why he went away."

"Didn't he ever leave any address of any kind in case anything happened to you or your brother?" asked the detective.

"Only this one," replied Sheila. "He told us that if we were really ill, or anything serious had happened, all we need do was to telegraph to this address. I asked him once how he would know if a telegram came, and he only smiled and told me it was the business of uncles to know these things. I was really too young to think about it much then, and he was always so good to us that it never occurred to Anthony or myself that there could be anything underhand about it."

"But somebody must have forwarded the telegram, or let him know," persisted Maxwell.

"That's what I used to think, but the only person who came to the house regu-

larly was Mrs. Bradlaugh, and I don't think she knew. In fact, I know she didn't, because Tony once asked her when we were children where uncle was, and she said she didn't know."

Sergeant Maxwell was silent for a few minutes. He was thinking of the interview Edwards had had with Mrs. Bradlaugh, thinking of the fact that she was once a criminal herself and had been friendly with Robert Usherwood longer than any one else who knew him, as far as he could find out. Had Mrs. Bradlaugh told the whole of the truth? Was she in league with Usherwood, and did she know where he was hiding now? It was curious, that arrangement about the telegram. Mrs. Bradlaugh would be, as far as he could see, the only one present to receive it, and therefore, if his surmise were right, she could be the only one to forward it, the only one to know Robert Usherwood's address. And if she knew it then, why not now? Perhaps, too, she might know the secret of Robert Usherwood's mysterious disappearances. Decidedly Mrs. Bradlaugh was worth watching a little more closely than she had been, and the detective made a mental note that on his return he would investigate a little further in that direction. There was, of course, the bare possibility that Usherwood returned to the house at least once a day, but in that case what was the object of pretending to go away at all? No, it was far more likely that he had left instructions of some kind with Mrs. Bradlaugh, in case he was wanted urgently.

"Do you happen to remember when was the last time your uncle went away, Miss Usherwood?" he asked.

"Yes, he was away for six or seven days just before the—the murder," replied Sheila. "He had only been back a bare week, in fact, and we didn't expect him to go away again for some time. There was generally a few months between each time, except lately."

"There is one other thing which might help," the sergeant continued, "and that is this: a thorough search of the house, in case your uncle may have left some scrap of paper with an address on it, an envelope, say, or something like that. It would perhaps lead to discovering——"

"We've done that," interrupted Sheila. "We have all three searched and found nothing. The only place we haven't searched, of course, is uncle's desk, which is locked. That's the one in the corner there."

The desk was just an ordinary writing desk with two drawers on each side, and the detective saw at once that there would be no difficulty in forcing it.

"I think, Miss Usherwood," he said slowly, "that I ought to see inside that desk. It may help to solve the puzzle, and we can't neglect any chance at this time. You have your brother to consider now, don't forget. I don't think that he is in any real danger, as I told Miss Tenterton, but the sooner we find him the sooner we shall find your uncle and the rest. May I break it open?"

Sheila Usherwood nodded, and her eyes filled with tears, as she thought of Anthony.

"Of course, if you think you ought to, Mr. Maxwell," she replied in a low voice. "Poor old Tony and I thought about it several times, but we didn't like to do it."

Without waiting further the sergeant drew a bunch of keys from his pocket and began trying them on the desk. He always carried several skeleton keys in case of emergency, and he anticipated no difficulty in opening the drawers. The locks, he had seen at once, were the ordinary cheap variety placed on most desks of the kind, and a moment later he had opened the first drawer, quickly followed by the remaining three. But save for one drawer the desk contained nothing of importance. That drawer contained a neatly tied bun-

dle of newspaper cuttings, and the first glance showed the detective that they dealt with the Linkram jewel case!

"Well, that hasn't helped us much, I am afraid, Miss Usherwood," he said quietly. "I'll have a look through these newspaper cuttings and see what they are about, however," he added, slipping them into his pocket. "And now I am going into the country for a few days to make some inquiries."

When Maxwell spoke of the country, a look of anxiety came into Sheila's blue eyes which the sergeant did not fail to see. "Oh, Mr. Maxwell, what shall we do?"

"You will be all right, Miss Usherwood," replied Maxwell reassuringly. "Detective Edwards will see there is some one in the house all the time, so long as you stay in it, and if you wish to go anywhere he will see that you are properly protected."

"There is nowhere else to go," cried Sheila. "We don't know what to do for the best. We have been relying on you, Mr. Maxwell."

"And don't worry, Miss Usherwood—that's my advice," returned Maxwell. "I know things seem very terrible to you both, but I have seen things look far worse than this and come out all right. It is always the last hour before dawn which seems blackest, and I think we are at that last hour now. Why," he added cheerfully, "you'll be smiling at all your troubles in a few days and wondering what you were worrying about."

"I only hope so," answered Barbara pathetically, but her voice belied her words. She had, as it seemed to her, looked a supreme happiness in the face only to have it snatched from her before she had realized that she had seen it. Those whispered words of Tony during their hours of captivity in that terrible house had bound them together forever, but now they seemed almost words of a dream. It seemed to her that Tony had hardly said them before he

had been snatched away from her forever.

"You must find my brother soon, Mr. Maxwell, for all our sakes," said Sheila softly, as she showed the detective out. "He is engaged to Miss Tenterton, you know, and actually proposed to her while they were still in that dreadful house."

Sergeant Maxwell looked steadily into those blue eyes which had enchained his heart and soul and then replied slowly:

"I hope, Miss Usherwood, when the time comes that I shall have the courage to do as your brother has done."

And for some reason best known to herself the blue eyes of Sheila Usherwood dropped before the steady brown ones of the sergeant, and her cheeks suddenly flushed a deeper red.

"You are not the kind of man to lack courage, Mr. Maxwell," she murmured, and then she added in almost a whisper: "We shall be very anxious until you are back again. You always make things appear so much better when you talk to us."

It is from the little things that men in love take comfort. And it was the sudden reddening of the cheeks of the girl he loved, and her reliance upon him, which gave the sergeant the comforting thought on his way to the railroad station that perhaps, after all, he might have the courage when the time came. It was only with an effort, indeed, that he put those rosy cheeks and blue eyes in the background of his thoughts, as the train began to move out of the station. He had much to do before he got to Rye. He wanted, for one thing, to make a close examination of the newspaper cuttings he had taken from the drawer of Robert Usherwood; for, though the top few had appeared to be about the Linkram jewel case, it did not follow they were all about that case. And for another thing he wanted to arrange in order the notes he had

made when reading the police file of the case, and to ruminate about those notes.

He had been warned by Edwards not to let his personal feelings enter into his investigations, and he was now beginning to find how much that warning meant to him. In love with Sheila Usherwood, he was engaged in tracking down her uncle whom she thought so much of, and, as far as he could see, Robert Usherwood was a thief and, perhaps, a murderer. If he solved the puzzle he felt that it meant the ruin of his own happiness.

"Well, duty's duty," he muttered to himself. "And I wish I'd been a coal heaver rather than on this case. My only chance is that old Usherwood is innocent, but I can't figure out how he can be. I wish I had half the faith in him she has. I'll have a look at those clippings, I think, in case there is anything useful in them."

There was a fairly thick pile of them, and he noted, as he cut the string, how dusty the top ones were, as though they had not been looked at for some considerable time. He looked over each clipping carefully, in case there was any little bit of newspaper gossip of the case which might prove useful. Two of the little slips proved more informing than he expected.

The first was dated the day after the three men had been sentenced to penal servitude, and it was simply headed "Morris Cortland."

With the sentence passed on Morris Cortland yesterday to seven years' penal servitude, there has disappeared for some time one of the most notorious crooks, whose operations are international, and whose dupes are legion. He has served two terms before, one for being concerned in robbing a bank in New York, the other for stealing the jewels of the famous American hostess, Mrs. Vander Lyn, jewels said to be worth a small fortune. It is a significant coincidence that in this jewel robbery, as in the recent case for which he has been sentenced, the jewels were not recovered, and one of his confed-

erates went into the witness box and swore that he had helped Cortland solely because the latter was aware of a secret in his life which he threatened to expose, if his victim did not supply the help that was wanted. Like Easthope, this confederate had a clean sheet as far as the police were concerned.

After his release from prison for the Vander Lyn robbery Cortland went to Europe and spent two years in Paris, where he was very flush with money, probably as a result of the sale of the jewels. He returned to this country and, though it was never proved against him, there was a strong suspicion that he was behind the Farnham Bank robbery for which a Richard Usherwood was sentenced some ten years or so ago and died in prison.

Sergeant Maxwell gave a low whistle, as he read the last sentence. So that was the connection between Robert Usherwood and Morris Cortland! And then he nodded his head in a negative.

"No, that can't be," he murmured to himself. "For it says that this Usherwood died in prison. It may have been a relative of some kind, a brother, perhaps. I wonder where Farnham is? The sooner inquiries are made in that direction, too, the better."

The last clipping was quite a short one and had evidently been taken from a city paper.

Yesterday Mr. Justice Cameron passed sentence of seven years' penal servitude on Richard Usherwood, the Farnham Bank cashier, who was found guilty on Thursday. It will be remembered that the judge postponed sentence until Friday morning to give the prisoner a chance to restore such of the stolen notes that were not discovered in his possession. Usherwood once more protested that he had no idea how the notes that were found came to be in the desk in his house, and he asserted his innocence of the robbery. A full report of the judge's summing up appeared in Friday morning's issue.

Maxwell settled back in his corner seat and ruminated about this new discovery. That it had some connection with the Linkram jewel robbery he felt no shadow of doubt, though he could not as yet see what the connection was. But it was important in this way that

it opened up a new line of investigation, and one that he meant to follow up personally as quickly as possible. There and then he wrote a letter to Detective Edwards, giving the gist of the two clippings and asking for a full report of the Farnham Bank robbery trial, as well as a photograph of Richard Usherwood. This letter he had posted at the first stop, and he expected that it would be in the hands of Edwards that evening.

"I guess," he wrote, "that this Richard Usherwood was probably a brother of Robert, and if the other newspaper clipping is correct in its statement that Cortland was behind the bank robbery, then it shows pretty clearly that he and Robert Usherwood are old acquaintances."

The newspaper clipping was, he was forced to admit, the first tangible result of his investigation into the past history of Robert Usherwood. True, it was only an indirect piece of history, but until then they had had nothing at all, direct or indirect. From it, however, he hoped to trace the Usherwood family, or to find some one who had known them and might be able to throw some light on the movements of Robert Usherwood during the last ten years, especially during those odd, mysterious disappearances.

For the remainder of his journey, however, he ruminated over the notes he had made of the Linkram case. His first note was that of the address of Mr. Linkram near Rye. The latter's estate was at Pickwick—a little village some two miles north of Rye. There he hoped to pick up some village gossip which might prove useful. And here he had made his second note: "Find out all that is possible about James Easthope in the village." Somehow the evidence at the trial had impressed him that Easthope was telling the truth, and that he had been the victim of Morris Cortland. This impression had been greatly strengthened by the newspaper

clipping which had referred to the Vander Lyn jewel robbery. His third note was to the effect to ascertain from Mr. Linkram, as well, as much about Easthope as possible, his references, his general character, and the like. If his employer happened to remember what references his secretary had given, the detective felt that here again was a possible source of information about the wanted man.

The more he got to know about him the better, for it more and more clarified the man's personality and enabled Maxwell to predict what his movements might be, or what kind of hiding place he might choose. And those things in themselves must narrow down the search considerably.

Maxwell, too, wanted to go over the ground of the robbery once more as carefully as possible. He meant to leave as little as possible to chance, for the puzzle he was now trying to solve was not the kind he could get an answer to without making the most painstaking inquiries. And his experience had made him realize that often what seemed quite a side issue, or a trifling clew, led to unexpected and important results. To Maxwell the obvious did not supply the best results so much as the half hidden.

When he arrived at Rye he arranged for his room for the night before calling on the local police chief and introducing himself.

"The Linkram jewels case?" asked Chief Clark. "Yes, I remember it very well. I was lucky enough to be on the scene at the time that it was reported."

"What I am trying to find out," replied Sergeant Maxwell, "is any one of those little things which did not appear in the evidence or the newspapers. What was the general opinion about young Easthope, for instance?"

"The general idea round these parts was that he was led astray," promptly returned the chief. "I knew him quite well, and a quieter, nicer fellow I

wouldn't wish to meet. If it hadn't been for that Cortland fellow he would not have been suspected for a moment."

"Cortland was seen about here, I suppose?"

"Oh, yes. He had a little cottage on the outskirts of Pickwick for some months before the robbery took place. We strongly suspected that he had hidden the jewels there, and we ransacked the place from top to bottom, as well as dug up the whole of the garden, but without any result. He posed as a writer and took us all in. If it hadn't been that he was seen walking along the Pickwick Road about two o'clock on the morning of the robbery, he might not have been suspected. Later, of course, he was recognized as a notorious criminal by some officers from the city."

"Do you know where Easthope came from?"

"Not exactly," replied the chief, "though I fancy it was somewhere up north of here. He was with Mr. Linkram when he took over the estate near Pickwick and renamed it Linkram Hall."

"Easthope couldn't, or wouldn't, account for his movements that night?" queried the sergeant.

"No, and that told pretty heavily against him. He was actually seen talking to Cortland in the city at seven o'clock at night, and, though he asserted that what he was talking about had nothing whatever to do with the robbery, he refused to say what it was. He admitted that he had known Cortland for some months, and that Cortland had actually suggested that he should help him to steal the jewels, but he had refused. The fact that he hadn't warned the police, nor told Mr. Linkram about the suggestions, also counted against him. Then again he was seen in the city at seven. No one saw Easthope or Cortland arrive at Rye, but Mr. Easthope reached Linkram Hall at

one o'clock in the morning and sat up, after telling the butler to go to bed. Cortland was seen on the road at two o'clock."

"But they might have motored to Rye," said Maxwell.

"Yes, that is possible," agreed the chief, "but we didn't trouble very much about the movements of the two men after their refusal to account for them. The undoubted fact was that both were here at the actual time of the robbery, and Cortland's footprints were found under the open window of Easthope's room. Oh, there was plenty of evidence of Cortland's guilt."

"But not so much of Easthope's," said the sergeant. "What part did Solly Lazar play?"

"According to his own story, he came down a few days before the robbery to carry out the actual breaking in for Cortland, if Easthope failed to leave the window open, as Cortland told Lazar he had arranged for him to do. The funny thing is that Lazar said they found the window open, and Cortland told his confederate to cut back into the road and keep a lookout."

"That told against Easthope?"

"Oh, yes; but he admitted that he had the windows opened while he was working, because it was a warm night. But he swore that he closed them and set the alarm before going to bed."

"When did he first mention that fact?"

"He told Mr. Linkram in the morning as soon as the jewels were found to be missing. The only point we could find in his favor was that he actually had done the work he said he had sat up to do. But whether he went to bed at two o'clock, as he said he had done, or three, there was nothing to show."

"Has Linkram got the same set of servants, do you happen to know?"

"Mostly," replied the chief. "Of course, there have been some changes. There's a new superintendent, for in-

stance, who came about two years ago, but the butler is still there."

"Well, I think I'll go over and see Mr. Linkram in the morning," said the sergeant finally. "And then I'll make a few inquiries in the village. I've got a feeling somehow that Easthope wasn't guilty, after all. He may have had what he thought was a strong reason for not giving away his movements that night."

What such a reason was Maxwell could not imagine. But at least two hours of the time between seven o'clock, when he was seen in New York, and one o'clock, when he arrived at Linkram Hall, must have been spent in traveling, and that only left four hours to be accounted for. What was he doing during that time? Was it of any importance to account for it or not? If he were not with Cortland, was not one of Cortland's confederates, and actually took no part in the robbery, then, of course, it did not matter what he was doing, though it was the greatest folly not to give the police the account for which they asked. If, on the other hand, he helped Cortland, as had been suggested, then, of course, he could not very well go into the witness box to account for the time in this way.

But Maxwell was determined to go on the line that Easthope was innocent, that he had had some quixotic reason for not speaking. He had indeed allowed himself to be too much influenced by his impressions, as he had on more than one case. That such impressions had often led him to a quicker solution of the problems he was tackling only encouraged him to cultivate them, instead of always sticking to the logic of cold facts. Logic, he knew, was all very well, but detectives sometimes were rather apt to leave out the unexpected human element, which upset the most careful calculations.

At ten o'clock the following morning

he found himself presenting his card to a staid old butler, whose kindly blue eyes and old-fashioned mutton-chop whiskers belied his frigid air, as he said stolidly: "I'll see if Mr. Linkram can see you."

Hir air lost a little of its coldness, however, as he returned and showed the detective into the library of the house.

"Ah, I see you are from the city, Sergeant Maxwell," smiled the gray-haired financier, looking keenly at the detective's card and then at the man himself. "Have you found the jewels after all these years?"

"We're on the track of them, Mr. Linkram, and hope in good time to restore them," returned the sergeant, and he gave an inward chuckle of satisfaction as he saw the sudden change from joking in the face of Linkram to an air of astonishment. "We have discovered a diamond bracelet."

"You don't mean to say that you really are on the track?" he cried eagerly, leaning forward. "You detectives are marvelous. I had given up hope of ever seeing them again, and so had Mrs. Linkram."

"We have been much nearer getting them than we were five years ago," said Maxwell. He related everything that had happened since the release of Morris Cortland.

"Bless my soul, what an extraordinary story!" cried the financier, when Sergeant Maxwell had finished. "There is very much more behind it all than you have yet discovered, I am afraid. But, since the thieves are falling out with one another over the jewels, I suppose there is always a chance of you stepping in and getting them. It's when they are agreed that the outlook won't be so helpful."

"Cortland and Usherwood will never agree now, I think," said Maxwell. "I thought, perhaps, the best thing would be to go over the actual scene of the robbery again to see if we had over-

looked any point at the time which might be important now."

"I don't think you'll find much here," smiled Linkram. "Of course, anything I can do, I will. My secretary's room is still the same as it was in Easthope's time, though I have a new secretary."

"It was principally about Easthope that I came here," said Sergeant Maxwell. "I have carefully gone through the evidence of the trial, and that, coupled with one or two things I have learned about Cortland and his methods, has given me a feeling that perhaps he wasn't guilty, after all."

Linkram looked up sharply.

"I am not sorry to hear you say that," he said quietly. "I liked young Easthope immensely. He was quiet and efficient and eager to get on, as far as I could see, and it came as a great shock to me to find that he had been mixed up with a criminal. I only wish he were innocent. But he behaved in such an extraordinary way on the night of the robbery, returning as he did at one o'clock in the morning and refusing all explanation, that it is difficult to believe he knew nothing about the theft."

"You knew he was in the city that day?"

"Oh, yes. As a matter of fact he had gone to execute a commission for me, and I rather expected him back on the train which gets into Rye at twenty to seven. When he didn't arrive by eleven o'clock, I presumed he had been delayed in town."

"The butler was up late?" questioned the sergeant. "He must have known that it wasn't any use sitting up."

"You needn't get suspicious about old Jameson," smiled Linkram. "He's been in the family for years, and I know his pedigree a generation back. It was just an accident he was up, due to a bad tooth troubling him."

"Can you tell me what references Easthope gave you?"

"Only one," answered the other. "He came from Henry Vicstone, the Boston cotton merchant, who had employed him since the days he left Cambridge, so in a sense I knew the whole of his career. Vicstone was very loath to part with him. I can't see, if Easthope did help to steal the jewels, what his motive could have been. He had a fairly good amount at the bank, never gambled, and had no vices of any kind, as far as I knew."

"That only strengthens my feeling that he is innocent," commented Maxwell. "It is very unusual for a man to break out suddenly like that. If there had been a woman in the case I could have understood it, and undoubtedly his banking account would have shown it. Now I'd like to have a look at the secretary's room. And if I could speak to some of the servants who were with you at the time of the robbery, I should be very glad."

"I'll instruct Mardon, my present secretary, to give you all facilities," returned Linkram. "And if you do show Easthope is innocent, then I for one will be more than glad to welcome him back."

Mardon proved to be a colorless young fellow in the early thirties, who had a slight air of boredom as he showed Maxwell into his room.

"Mr. Linkram tells me you want to go over this room because it is where the thieves entered, sergeant," he said. "I am afraid it won't tell you very much."

"Maybe, maybe not," answered Maxwell shortly. "I don't expect it to tell me much, as a matter of fact. French windows, I see, with shutters for the night," he continued, walking across the room.

"Yes, the closing of the shutters automatically sets the alarm," said the secretary.

"That big roll-top desk, was it always there?"

"Yes, that's the only place in the room for it. The light falls from the

windows on it better there than anywhere else. It was in that position when I first came here five years ago, and it has never been moved."

"It's rather an unusual size in desks?" questioned Maxwell.

"It was specially made to Mr. Linkram's order, I believe," answered the secretary. "It has a steel lining and special locks."

Maxwell eyed the desk thoughtfully. He was thinking of what he would have done if he had been in Cortland's place. It would have been comparatively easy for him to slip through the open window and crouch behind the desk, where he would be completely hidden. It merely wanted just a few seconds' opportunity when Easthope's back was turned, and such an opportunity was more than likely to have occurred. That would explain quite simply how the room was entered without the alarms being set off. And for a man of Cortland's abilities, added probably to those of Solly Lazar, it would be child's play to pick the lock of the door after Easthope had gone to bed, and so obtain an entry into the rest of the house.

True, Easthope had said he had gone to bed at two o'clock, and Cortland had been seen on the Pickwick Road about the same time. But, as the detective knew, "about two o'clock" was an elastic enough time to be a quarter of an hour one way or the other in the country, and Linkram Hall grounds ran down to Pickwick Road.

He spent another half hour interviewing the butler and several of the other servants who had been there at the time of the robbery, but with no further result than to confirm the impression he had already obtained of Easthope's innocence. All spoke well of him, and all strongly asserted that he was not the type of man to rob his master. The butler, indeed, was outspoken enough to suggest that the evidence against him had been weighed down by the police

from the city, a suggestion Sergeant Maxwell wisely let go by without comment.

"I'll have a stroll through the grounds and get the general lay of the land before I go," he said finally to the secretary.

"Hales, the superintendent, will show you around, if you will excuse me," returned the latter. "I saw him pass the windows coming up to the house a few minutes ago."

Hales proved more talkative than the rest of the servants.

"I am afraid I can't help you much," he said at once. "I did not come here till two years ago. You'll pick up most gossip, I dare say, from the landlord of the inn in Pickwick."

"There is one point on which you might help me," returned Maxwell. "Have you see any strangers in the ground lately, the last month or so, say?"

Hales looked sharply at the other.

"Funny you should ask that," he answered. "There was one old gentleman—yes it would be about a month ago. I found him wandering through the woods. He was very apologetic when I pointed out to him that he was trespassing. Explained he was staying at the inn for a week and had no idea he was doing any harm. But you never know about strangers. Lansdowne was his name, so I heard from the landlord of the inn afterward. But he wasn't up to any harm. Offered to go along with me to see Mr. Linkram and explain."

"Where did he come from?" asked Maxwell.

"The landlord told me he came from the city."

Sergeant Maxwell fished a number of photographs from out of his pocket.

"Any of these men?" he asked quietly.

"That one," promptly replied Hales, pointing to a photograph of Robert Usherwood.

"As I guessed," murmured the de-

tective to himself; and aloud: "You have given me more information than you thought you could, Mr. Hales."

A few minutes later he was strolling thoughtfully along the Pickwick Road in the direction of the Pickwick Inn.

CHAPTER XIV.

MAXWELL GOES TO FARNHAM.

THE landlord of the inn had little further information to give Maxwell concerning Robert Usherwood.

"Yes, that's Mr. Lansdowne," he agreed when the sergeant showed him the photograph of Robert Usherwood. "Stayed here just on a week, and a very quiet gentleman I found him. Very fond of walking he was, out most of the day in the country. We have some very pretty spots round here, if you ever think of taking a quiet holiday."

"When I have finished what I am on, I'll think about it," smiled Sergeant Maxwell.

He led the conversation round to the Linkram jewel robbery.

"I always did think that fellow Cortland wasn't up to much good," said the landlord, with the wisdom of a man after the event. "He was a bit too free with his questions for my liking. Wanted to know all about everybody, he did. So as to see they was out of the way, I suppose, when he went up to the Hall."

"Created a bit of a sensation for a quiet little village like Pickwick, eh?" inquired Maxwell.

"You're right there. It's the only big thing that's happened here for years. As I was telling Mr. Lansdowne, and as I'm telling you, we had more detectives down from the city that week than we've seen since for five years."

"Mr. Lansdowne was interested then?"

"Couldn't keep off it one night," replied the landlord. "Wanted to know who'd got the cottage where Cortland lived, and what I thought of Mr. East-

hope—a nice young fellow he was—and I don't know what."

The sergeant let the landlord ramble on, and the result of the best part of an hour's conversation brought to light the fact that Robert Usherwood, under the name of Lansdowne, had shown a greater interest in the robbery than most visitors had done, had visited the cottage where Cortland had stayed, and had been shown over it, and had gone back to the city hurriedly, after telling the landlord the day before that he might be staying on for a fortnight or so. One curious fact which Maxwell elicited was that Robert Usherwood was often out comparatively late at night.

"Mad on moths," explained the landlord. "Went out what he called treacling. Caught some fine ones that I didn't know were in the country. Not that I take much interest in insects myself, but we all have our hobbies."

Maxwell had no need to be told that the moth-hunting craze of Robert Usherwood was nothing but a cloak to prevent suspicion being aroused when he was out late at night. But what was he doing there? That question still remained to be answered, though the sergeant hazarded a guess that he had come down to make some sort of a search for the missing jewels.

Sergeant Maxwell knew that Cortland had stayed in his cottage on the day following the crime, and had, in fact, been arrested there by Detective Edwards; but no trace of the jewels had been found, and it was difficult to see how the arrested man had managed to get rid of them. He was not the type to trust them to the tender mercies of a fellow crook. But even if, as was strangely suspected at the time, and not without good reason, Cortland had hidden the jewels somewhere in the neighborhood, for Robert Usherwood to expect to find them was like a man searching for a particular drop of water in the ocean, an impossible task. But it

was a significant fact that Usherwood was in the neighborhood the very week that Cortland had been released from prison, just as it was significant that he turned up at his house a few days later with the jewels and had handed them to Barbara Tenterton.

He spent the rest of the day making inquiries in the neighborhood, particularly with regard to any strangers being seen there about the same time as Robert Usherwood had been. But, though strangers had appeared in the village, no one was able to recognize the photographs of Cortland or Easthope, which Maxwell consistently showed to all of whom he made inquiries, and who had not known the two some five years before. Nor, on reflection, was it likely they would, he decided; for neither of the men, if they visited the neighborhood again, would be likely to do so without disguising themselves.

The following day found him back again at headquarters, and there he learned that Detective Edwards in turn had been making discoveries.

"The Farnham Bank robbery took place some twelve years ago," he told his subordinate. "It created a big sensation locally, but was hardly reported in the city papers."

"Where is Farnham, by the way?" asked Sergeant Maxwell.

"Up the State," answered Edwards. "The cashier was Richard Usherwood, and he apparently got away with some twenty-five thousand dollars. I telephoned the chief there and got his report this morning, giving a brief outline of the case. Usherwood put up the defense that he had no idea how the notes had been stolen. Against that were the facts that some of the stolen notes were found in his house, and that he had been known to be drinking heavily for some time and mixing with undesirable companions. In fact, the report says that only a short time before the

robbery he had been warned by the manager that his conduct would be likely to lead to his dismissal. The report just briefly states that Usherwood had had domestic trouble of some kind which seemed to have sent him off his head. The chief has promised to forward a full report in the next few days and as much information about Usherwood as he can gather."

"I don't think I'll wait for that," answered Maxwell. "I'll go up and get it. It looks as though we are on the track at last. Does the report say anything about Cortland?"

"No, nothing. I told the chief over the phone that the urgent thing was to get a brief outline of the trial through first and follow up with the rest when he could," said Edwards.

"Well, we are getting something tangible at last," nodded Maxwell. "I've got the fact that Easthope was up at Cambridge, and we can get what his home address was from there, and so trace him a bit farther. Did you see Miss Usherwood yesterday?"

"Oh, yes; I called and had a chat with them," smiled Edwards. "They're pretty plucky, those two girls, for they're having a hard time of it just at present. They seem to have got a blind faith in you, Maxwell, and I played on that; I told them you were on a new clew which might lead to important results. There's nothing like hope to keep them from breaking down."

"Better not let them know I am in town then," said Sergeant Maxwell. "They will only expect me to tell them everything, and I haven't got any news of the only thing which matters to them, Anthony Usherwood and his uncle. How are the trains to Farnham?"

"I thought perhaps you'd go up there, yourself, if you could," returned Edwards. "And I looked them up. There's one at four which gets in just after eleven."

The greater part of those hours of

traveling the detective spent in turning over in his mind the little he had discovered, but without getting much nearer any solution of the mystery. He felt sure, however, that he was on the right tack, just as he had been in regard to the earliest association of Cortland and Easthope and Usherwood, and he knew very well that he could do little more by staying in the city. That end of the investigation was in competent hands enough, and ceaseless inquiries were being made in the underworld to obtain news of the wanted men. It is only the spectacular work of the police which obtains a place in the newspapers, and the steady, painstaking work which leads up to the sensational ending is nearly always overlooked. Did he but know, however, the patient inquiries he was now making were to lead him ultimately to the goal of his endeavors, and to bring to a pair of blue eyes the happiness which was rightfully theirs.

"The Usherwoods were a well-known family in the town when the break came," explained the chief of Farnham on the following morning, "though the father and mother were both dead when Richard was arrested."

"Exactly how did you come to suspect him?" asked Maxwell.

"He didn't turn up at the bank one morning, and it was discovered that some notes were missing," replied the other. "They had been taken from the smaller safe in which Usherwood was supposed to put all the current cash. The day before was market day, always a heavy day at the bank, so there was more in that safe than usual. Usherwood was found in his own house, recovering from a drunken bout, apparently, with some of the notes on him and some in his desk. He swore that he must have been drugged; but it was notorious that he had been drinking heavily of late, and there were plenty of empty bottles about. He strenuously

denied from beginning to end having anything to do with the robbery."

"I gather from a newspaper cutting that a crook named Cortland was supposed to be at the back of the case?"

"That is so," returned the chief, "though we could never get anything on him. He was about with Usherwood a good deal during the last year before the smash came, and they were always drinking together. As a matter of fact, Usherwood, while waiting trial, told his lawyer that Cortland had encouraged him to drink to drown his sorrows. You know his wife left and took with her their two children?"

"You don't happen to know the names of those children, I suppose?"

"Yes; they were a boy and a girl, Anthony and Sheila."

"I have been expecting that reply for the last twenty-four hours," remarked Maxwell. "They're in the city now, concerned in the murder of Solly Lazar."

Briefly he outlined the story of the remarkable reappearance of Cortland and the Linkram jewels.

"By golly, then Robert must be the brother, without a doubt!" exclaimed the chief, when the detective had finished. "I never knew him. He left home when a youngster, as I remember, and Richard apparently lost touch with him."

"He didn't appear at the trial then?"

"Not to our knowledge," replied the other.

"When did Mrs. Usherwood leave her husband, and why?" asked Sergeant Maxwell.

"About three months before the robbery. It completely broke him up and sent him to the dogs. She just left a note one day saying that she was in love with another man and disappeared with the children. Usherwood never even knew the man who had bolted with his wife."

"He suspected some one surely?"

"Yes, he suspected Cortland, as a

matter of fact, but, as Cortland didn't leave here for some months later, it was only a suspicion. I believe he tackled Cortland about it, and the crook managed to satisfy him that he wasn't responsible."

"Well, somehow or other Robert Usherwood had managed to find those two children again, but I generally gather that the mother is dead, or at any rate they believe so. From what they tell me they have been with their uncle for the last ten years. There's one thing to be said for him, even if he is a criminal: he has done everything he can to give them a chance in life. They almost worship him."

"Criminals don't do that kind of thing, Maxwell, at least not in my experience. You are inclined, I gather, to think Easthope is innocent. Perhaps Richard Usherwood was another victim of Cortland, as we suspected. But we didn't know so much about him in those days as you have learned, or we should have held him."

"I shan't rest easy till I lay my hands on Cortland!" exclaimed Maxwell angrily. "I can't think those two had a criminal father or mother. They are too transparently simple and honest."

"And I dare say when you get him you will have the murderer of Solly Lazar," continued the chief. "But I don't quite see what part Robert Usherwood and Easthope have been playing."

"That's the key to the mystery," said Sergeant Maxwell. "If I could get on to that I don't think we should be far from solving the whole affair. If I were perfectly sure of Easthope's innocence, then I should put it down that they are out for revenge of some kind. How long was Usherwood in prison before he died?"

"Less than a year," answered the other. "I think the shock of his wife leaving him killed him. He asserted his innocence even on his death bed."

And I believe him," said Maxwell solemnly. "What was his wife's maiden name?" he added.

"I don't know," answered the chief. "He married some city girl quite unexpectedly. I don't know, but somehow her name never cropped up. But I'll take you along to the bank if you like. The manager used to know him and his wife well, so perhaps he knows."

"Poor Usherwood's wife?" answered the bank manager when the position had been explained to him. "Yes, she was a charming woman, highly emotional and easily swayed. I should like to know the scoundrel who broke up that home. No, I can't say I remember her maiden name. Stay, but I ought to. I met her brother once, I remember."

He leaned back in his chair and thought for a few minutes and then nodded his head slowly.

"No, it's slipped my mind," he said at last.

Suddenly Sergeant Maxwell had an inspiration and, pulling out his pocket-book, handed a photograph to the manager.

"Was that the brother?" he asked eagerly.

"Yes," promptly replied the bank manager in astonishment.

"His name is Easthope," cried Maxwell triumphantly.

He had ceased to be astonished now at anything in this most astonishing case. The links of the chain were beginning to fall into position, and before long the whole chain would be in his hands. His visit to Farnham, he reflected on his journey back to the city, had been well worth the time, and he had brought to light the one piece of information which he might have missed if he had not gone up to Farnham.

"Well, you are certainly to be congratulated, Maxwell," said Edwards when he had read his subordinate's report. "You have shown a bigger connection between Easthope and Usher-

wood than we had suspected. So he's Usherwood's brother-in-law? That adds interest to the fight between them and Cortland, if the latter is to blame for all their trouble, and I don't for one moment doubt that he is."

"There have been no new developments at this end?"

"None," replied Edwards. "But they are bound to break out soon again. The newspapers have been pretty severe over the kidnaping of young Usherwood, chatting gayly about our effete police system. Of course, we haven't said it was Cortland."

"News is short, that's all," granted Maxwell. "It's Robert Usherwood's

turn to show his hand now. The papers will have told him that Cortland has won a move against him, if Cortland hasn't already told him. You'll say nothing about what I've found out about Easthope, I suppose?"

"No, the less said about that at present the better," replied Edwards.

"Have you found out any information as to the visitors Cortland and Easthope received, or any letter they wrote while in prison?" asked his subordinate.

"No, the information hasn't come through yet," answered Edwards. "We ought to have some report by to-morrow morning."

To be concluded in next week's issue of DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE.



GEMS HIDDEN IN CANE FOR CENTURIES.

A TALE of unusual mystery was unfolded a short time ago in Ashland, Oregon, in the prosaic offices of a local district attorney. The incident which brought to light the unusual details of this mystery was the dropping on the office floor of a cane carried by a man who went to the lawyer's offices to sign a mortgage on his home. The cane is the property of G. K. Mortgine, an aged bachelor, who lives in Ashland.

Mortgine, his hands trembling with emotion, accidentally knocked the cane to the floor as he was about to sign the necessary papers for the loan. The agate head of the cane was shattered, revealing in the hollow stick a quantity of pearls which rolled out upon the floor. When the gems had been gathered together it was apparent that they would make a perfectly matched necklace. A local jeweler who was called upon to appraise the stones said that they would bring not less than \$100,000.

The following account of the cane was told by Mortgine: "About 1884, while I was living on my farm in Happy Hollow, on the Root River, near Marion, Minnesota, a squaw man, accompanying a band of Sioux Indians camping along the river, was seized with smallpox and abandoned by the redmen. I found the stricken man in a tepee, alone and delirious. I took him to my cabin and cared for him for weeks and restored him to health. Having nothing else with which to reward me, the man gave me the quaint, agate-headed cane which he seemed to admire greatly. He explained that it was an heirloom which his family in Bohemia had handed down from father to son for many generations. I came near losing the cane several times. Once, when wishing to raise money to go to Iowa, I pawned it in a shop not far from the Dearborn Station in Chicago. Another time I left it as a pledge in Minneapolis."

With the proceeds of the sale of the pearls Mortgine is planning to buy his old farm in Happy Hollow and to stock it with thoroughbred cattle. He is making every effort to learn the whereabouts of the squaw man whom he befriended, whose name was Louis Kolland, or Kollance.

Spirit Justice

by Ernest M. Poate

Author of "Candy for Cattle," "The Broken Chord," etc.

DINNER was safely over; Mrs. Gardner and her guests were assembled in the big living room, looking politely bored. The hostess glanced covertly at the clock and sighed. Only nine! To her nervous fancy the evening stretched into eternity.

She looked the company over, as they sat in a wide circle before the fireplace. Opposite her, against the farther wall, her husband leaned back in his chair, comfortably replete, almost dozing. His bald dome shone in the firelight; his round, red face was placid. With the exasperating detachment of some husbands, he had abandoned all responsibility for the entertainment of his guests. He was content; let them enjoy themselves as they chose—or not, if they chose!

Next sat Mrs. Boudreau, ineffectual, weakly pretty, colorless in her black dinner dress. She was a widow; at best painfully timid and without much power of talk. To-night the general gloom seemed to have extinguished what faint glimmer of sociability she possessed. Her pale gaze brooded upon the flames; she ignored her neighbors.

Beyond was Rudolph Sigerson, lean and stooped, with a cadaverous visage burnt almost black by the sun. He was a botanist, lately returned from an orchid-collecting expedition along the Amazon. He shivered at times, as though not yet adjusted to this colder climate; and he sat as silent as if still in the South American wilderness.

Miss Theo Fox, tall and slender, nerv-

ously abrupt of gesture, seemed to be doing her best to enliven matters. Her fair face, too sharply thin for real beauty, was animated; her big eyes flashed and rolled affectedly; she chattered constantly in a shrill, unpleasant voice that was broken every few seconds by a high-pitched, explosive, mirthless laugh—plainly a nervous affection, almost a tic.

Her neighbor on the left, young George Sinclair, listened gloomily to her incoherent talk, flinching involuntarily at her shrill tittering. He answered only in monosyllables; his black eyes were all for the girl on his other side. His lean, handsome face was anxious, yet sullen.

Miss Elinor Rolland ignored him ostentatiously. She was a tiny person, scarcely five feet high, yet well rounded, beautifully shaped. Her small, dark face was vividly pretty, framed in black hair knotted low at the nape of her slender neck.

Mrs. Gardner eyed these last two longest. "They've quarreled," she whispered to Peter Doane, who sat beside her. "And it's going to spoil my party! Oh, dear! Why doesn't somebody say *something*?"

Peter Doane was a large, stout, middle-aged man, with a big, square, clean-shaven face. His keen, tired gray eyes and his kindly, tolerant smile invited confidences. All sorts of people continually confided in Peter Doane.

"Cheer up," he murmured. "Let 'em alone, and they'll come out of it. Lovers will quarrel."

His hostess made a movement of ex-

asperation. "I know it. But why must they at my party? Why, it's like a morgue! We might play flinch," she offered desperately. "And I thought, with Mr. Sigerson and Elinor and you, there'd be some interesting talk!"

"Do you want me to talk," inquired Mr. Doane placidly.

"Why, of course! Can't you tell us some of your experiences? About arresting a murderer or something? Listen, everybody!"

She rose impulsively to call the attention of the others. But Theo Fox, whose shrill chatter had run on all this time, was ahead of her.

"Oh, goody!" Miss Fox clapped her hands in exaggerated delight, and set off her loud, mirthless laugh, like a watchman's rattle. "Oh, goody! Of course she will! Elinor, dear, Mr. Sigerson wants you to do a trance for us." Her big, bright eyes flashed maliciously toward the smaller girl.

Elinor Rolland shook her head. "I don't think——" she began.

But young Sinclair interrupted. "Elinor!" he cried roughly. "You're not to do it—you hear? I won't have it! You know——"

The girl rose abruptly. Her small face flushed darkly; there was an angry glint in her black eyes. "Why, of course!" she answered sweetly, conspicuously ignoring the man beside her. "Why, of course I'll do a séance, if you folks would like it?"

Mrs. Gardner frowned a little. "Dear me!" she whispered to Peter Doane. "I wish Theo hadn't suggested that! She's always doing the wrong thing. But anything's better than just sitting here, dumb, I suppose." And aloud she urged Miss Rolland on.

"Oh, yes, dear! That would be just the thing. Do go on and show us a trance medium, won't you?"

Every one murmured assent more or less enthusiastically. Mrs. Boudreau stared at the girl from pale, intense eyes,

hands clasped tight. "Oh, Miss Rolland! Are you really, really psychic?" Her tone was heavy with awe.

Elinor Rolland laughed a little. "Oh, yes; I'm good," she declared flippantly, with a hard glance at Sinclair. "At least everybody says so."

"It's killing, really," whispered Mr. Gardner, roused from his incipient nap. "She can do table tipping, spirit knocks, slate writing, and all that, just as well as a regular medium. I don't know how she ever caught onto it; but she can show you just how these mediums fake everything they do."

Mr. Rudolph Sigerson frowned angrily and rose. He turned toward his hostess, holding his lean shoulders erect by an effort. His thin frame shook visibly, between nervous anger and chill.

"I'm so sorry, madam," he declared. "I must ask to be excused. I am not well; it is late; I must go home."

And home he went, despite all protests; nor did he offer any other reason for his sudden departure, save that, as he left the room, he muttered something about "sacrilege."

This damped the newly awakened ardor of the company for a moment; but presently Miss Fox renewed her noisy urgings. "Come on, Elinor, don't let anybody scare you off. Do go on and give us an exhibition, please!" And then, seeing that the girl hesitated, she added maliciously: "Never mind looking at George Sinclair; he'll forgive you afterward!"

At which Miss Rolland compressed her lips angrily and yielded at once. "All right then. If you'll set a table here in the middle of the room, and all take your places round it."

They obeyed; Mrs. Gardner rather doubtfully, the young widow, Mrs. Boudreau, between eagerness and fear, Peter Doane and the host with tolerant good humor, and young Sinclair angrily, muttering beneath his breath. Theo Fox whooped shrilly, clapping her hands:

"Oh-h-h! Ha, ha, ha! How lovely! I just know I'll be scared to death! Who's going to hold my hand?" And she rolled her eyes.

George Sinclair only grunted in response to the coquettish invitation of her glance; and Miss Fox flushed. The hostess whispered to Peter Doane, beside her: "Theo would give anything to catch George Sinclair. She just *hates* Elinor. Watch her trying to make trouble between them!" She smiled meaningly.

It was evident that Sinclair took the proposed séance in bad part. He took his place at the table in gloomy silence; and Miss Fox managed by a tolerably bold maneuver to place herself between him and the "medium," Elinor Rolland.

Now all were seated about a round table. At Miss Rolland's right sat Mrs. Boudreau, faintly flushed, with a pathetic, mystical light in her pale eyes. It seemed that she, at least, took the coming manifestations seriously. Beyond her sat Mr. Gardner, and his wife; then Peter Doane; next was young Sinclair, his right hand limp in Theo Fox's firm grip.

Elinor Rolland leaned back in her chair. Her dark, vivid face took on a strange, remote expression. Her lids drooped. "All join hands," she ordered softly. "We must establish *rapport*."

Obediently the others clasped hands upon the table and sat waiting, their expressions varying from incredulity and amused tolerance to half-believing awe. There was a brief silence.

Elinor Rolland's face turned paler, became quite blank. Her eyes closed. An oddly changed, monotonous voice issued from her motionless lips.

"The spirits are near. They are all about us. I feel them."

At her right, Mrs. Boudreau moaned faintly; in the stillness the others heard her soft, hurrying breath. Miss Rolland stiffened abruptly. Her hands, lying on the table before her, tight held by the

hands of the woman on either side, trembled visibly.

"I feel them!" she cried. "I feel their presence!"

No one moved. Beneath the bright lights the circle sat rigid; all their joined hands lay on the table in plain sight. But the heavy table, which Doane and Sinclair, both strong men, had moved into place with some labor, began now to quiver and tilt visibly. The hostess gave a little, startled gasp. Mrs. Boudreau moaned again.

"Is there a spirit present?" droned Elinor Rolland's low, toneless voice.

The table stirred beneath their hands, gathered itself like an unwieldy animal about to rise, and then it tilted strongly, so that one side lifted itself several inches. Peter Doane threw the weight of both his hands—held on either side by Mrs. Gardner and young Sinclair—against it; he bore down with all his strength. But the table rose until its tilted edge was almost as high as his chin.

"Are there spirits present? Answer!" commanded the medium sharply.

From somewhere—apparently from the very center of the table itself—came a single, loud knock, as though knuckles had rapped against wood.

"Answer!" repeated Elinor Rolland.

The table quivered, sank slowly until it rested upon all four legs once more. From its center, apparently, came a whole shower of knockings. Still the ring of clasped hands upon its polished top remained in place; but Mrs. Boudreau's arms were trembling violently. The breath hissed between her pale, parted lips.

"Some one turn out the lights," murmured Miss Rolland. "I feel my—my control—coming." She shivered, then grew rigid. Her eyes turned up until only their whites were visible.

Half amused, half impressed, and wholly curious, Peter Doane rose and switched out the lamps, then tiptoed

back to his place in the circle. "Isn't she wonderful?" whispered his hostess. There was an odd quaver in her voice.

"Yes," agreed Doane grimly. "Quite so!"

Now the room was dark. The fire had died down until its glowing coals only intensified the gloom. No one could see his neighbor; the circle of clasped hands on the table showed only as lighter blurs in the darkness.

"I am Daniel Hebner," a deep voice announced abruptly. It seemed to come from Elinor Rolland's lips; yet it was indubitably a male voice, one would have said. "I passed over long ago. I come to—come to——"

The grave, measured tones hesitated, ceased. There was a pause. Then: "There is another here with a message," they went on. "He is very eager. He speaks. I get a strange feeling. Something barks. It's an animal! Is it a wolf? No, a fox!"

Young Sinclair grunted one short note of reluctant laughter. There in the dark, Peter Doane's eyes narrowed reflectively. He would have liked to see Theo Fox's face just then!

But the revelation went on, so gravely, so impressively, that mirth seemed quite out of place. "Not an animal—no; a man's name—Fox—Alfred Fox. Is there any one here——"

A pause. Miss Fox held a stubborn silence. Doane fancied he could feel her anger.

"No matter. He says—he tells me to say he is sorry. He has no rest where he is. He—he—— Confession! I get it now. He wants to confess."

From the darkness came a sound, as of scuffling, and a strangled whisper: "Let me *go*, I say! I—I won't *stand* it!"

Then George Sinclair's voice, half amused, half irritated. "No, I shan't! Sit still and listen. You asked for this!"

To himself Peter Doane wondered what secret Elinor's "control" had touched, whether by chance or design.

There was something evidently which Miss Fox did not wish brought out.

But the deep, measured tones went on unheeding. "He wants to confess, this Alfred Fox, so he can get peace. He says to tell you all he once worked a gum machine with a button off his coat. But he was young then, and he didn't know any better!"

A murmur of half-startled mirth, quickly repressed. This sudden anticlimax was too much for some of the party. But above it rose Theo Fox's voice, shrill and angry.

"I'll fix you for that, Elinor Rolland! Just you wait! I'll——"

"Be quiet!" urged Sinclair beside her. "Can't you take a joke?"

But the solemn tones of the control went on, unheeding: "There is another here, a man—a young man. I get a B—no, a G—no, D!"

Again Mrs. Boudreau's breathing sounded sharp and loud. Doane felt convinced, by its very quality, that the widow, heedless of the byplay just past, expected a message "from beyond." His lips tightened, and he scowled, there in the dark, at the thoughtless cruelty of this thing. If the Rolland girl should really awake this poor woman's sorrowing credulity to play on it with her mummery of spirits—why, it would be wicked!

"A—D," the voice droned on. "Yes, D. D, E—D, O—no; D, A! D-A-R, D-A-L—no; D-A-V——"

A quivering voice, full of desperate hope, cut across the slow-spelled letters. "Oh-h-h! *David!* My David!"

The control seemed to hesitate. Peter Doane blushed, there in the dark, for his connection with this cruel foolery, slight as it was. But the deep voice went on, rather hurriedly:

"He—he says: 'I am happy here. I am very happy—happy and waiting. That's all!'"

Mrs. Boudreau began to cry quietly, not hopelessly, as if stirred by the

memory of some old joy. There was a long pause. Doane wondered if the medium had the grace to be ashamed of herself.

At last there came a faint stir. Elinor Rolland's natural voice asked uncertainly: "Did—did any one come?"

Sinclair pushed back his chair. "Yes," he answered irritably. "You've done quite enough for one night. Let's have the lights again."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Miss Fox shrilly. Her high-pitched tones rang with malice. "Why, we're just beginning! Such a lovely time! Do go on, please!"

"Elinor! Don't you dare."

It was still dark; but just then the dying fire flared, and Peter Doane caught one glimpse of Miss Rolland's face. At Sinclair's peremptory command it set stubbornly; the girl tossed her head.

"I came back." That deep, masculine-sounding voice again. "I had to come back for a minute." Elinor Rolland's face was rigid, colorless; her eyes were rolled up.

Peter Doane frowned to himself. The dying fire glinted on young Sinclair's face, sullen and angry; showed Theo Fox, beyond him, watching Miss Rolland sidelong with a look of satisfied malice. "That girl's well named," thought Doane uneasily. "She is a fox, sure enough! She looks *bad*. She must hate Elinor Rolland; she's just doing this to make more trouble between her and Sinclair." And he felt, from the expression of the medium's face, that the young man's opposition would only drive her to new flights of fancy. "She'll make more enemies if she isn't careful," he reflected.

"I had to come back," the deep voice went on. "There is another here waiting—waiting to reveal herself. She says—she says one of you will know her."

The fire had died down and the room was black. Came a pause, made deeper

by tiny, repressed rustlings and stirrings. Despite his unemotional make-up, his sure knowledge that all this was make-believe, Peter Doane felt the short hairs of his nape pricking. It would not be hard to believe that spirits were truly here!

The circle sat unmoving; their clasped hands still lay on the table, though now scarcely visible, even as lighter spots in the dark. Some one whispered faintly: "Hold tight, all!" An impulse ran around the table, and each gripped his neighbor's hands tighter yet. The circle was unbroken.

Yet, from a far corner of the dark room, there came now an unmistakable movement. Doane heard a deep sigh behind him and shrank involuntarily, as from a blow. Surely—surely there was another presence in the room!

It came closer, hovered over him. Doane held his posture only by an effort of will. He longed to slide beneath the table; to run away; to turn at least and face this grisly thing behind. But he refused to move.

The thing stirred, sighed; spoke in a faint whisper.

"I have come back—back from the other side. I'm here for one moment only. It's so hard—oh, it's *so* hard to stay!"

The whisper was strained, as though with physical effort. One felt that this visitor from another world remained only by a tremendous struggle.

"Alice," the whisper ran on. "I want Alice. I must see Alice—touch her—for one moment. Only one!"

Yearning spoke through the soft words. With an effort Peter Doane cast off the spell. Elinor Rolland was doing it well, he admitted grimly. She'd make a sensation. She had picked out the most impressionable of the group. For Alice was Mrs. Boudreau's first name. But it was cruel—senselessly cruel! Only happy youth could be so cruel.

"Alice—Alice!" sighed the voice. There was a faint rustle, as its owner moved along behind the circle, searching, searching.

Then came Mrs. Boudreau's voice, shaking with fearful joy. "Here I am, dear—here! Oh, is it—is it Mary?"

A breathless pause. Then quite suddenly a click! The lights snapped on, bald, brilliant, prosaic. Around the table, folk stared at each other foolishly, bewildered.

The circle of clasped hands was unbroken. Yet one member of the group was missing. Now Mrs. Boudreau's left hand clasped Theo Fox's right and each woman looked at the other in unbelieving amazement.

"Wh-where is——" Theo began.

George Sinclair laughed shortly, mirthlessly, and gestured over his shoulder. Elinor stood by the door, one hand still at the light switch. She was poised on tiptoe, smiling at them impishly, waiting for applause. Peter Doane shrugged. It was simple enough; he felt chagrined that he should have been betrayed into nervousness, even for a moment. Of course it was the regular old medium trick. Elinor had taken advantage of the dark to free first one hand and then the other; to join the hand of her neighbor on one side with that of the neighbor on the other—the simplest bit of sleight of hand. Yet it had been well done.

There was another silence. Elinor Rolland's smile of pride changed, became uncertain, disappeared. "Aren't you—weren't you amused?" she faltered.

Mrs. Boudreau rose slowly. Her face was colorless once more and weary and bitter. "So it was only a joke?" she asked dully. "Only a joke! I—I should have known!"

Elinor looked at her penitently; but a tiny imp of mischief danced in her eyes. "I—yes, only a joke," she admitted. "I'm sorry, dear; I didn't mean to——".

The older woman put out a hand. That was all; but the sudden, almost threatening force of that dynamic gesture struck all the words from the girl's careless lips.

"You—you cheated me!" Her lips shut tight, clipping off the words. Every sagging, irresolute line of her pale face tightened, grew tense, ominous. The light-colored eyes flamed coldly. Patently there was still fire in this languid, pale Mrs. Boudreau.

"Some day you'll pay for this—sooner than you think, perhaps!"

The threat dropped into dead silence, with a sinister emphasis. Elinor Rolland looked about uncertainly, to find encouragement nowhere. All eyes were averted from her face; her tiny figure seemed rather pathetic in its sudden isolation.

"I—I was only trying to amuse everybody," she faltered.

Mrs. Boudreau turned her back deliberately. "I must go now," said she coldly. Her tense figure began to tremble; she bit her lip, then turned and fumbled blindly toward the door. "Good—good night, Mrs. Gardner!"

She bowed slightly and was gone.

Theo Fox rose now. "So sorry, but I must run along, too, Mrs. Gardner. Such a nice party!" She exploded into that high, mirthless laugh; her shrill voice rose higher. "So—quaint. Good night everybody! Good-by, Elinor, dear. I do *hope* Mrs. Boudreau will forgive you—and that George will, too!"

Her malicious glance brushed Sinclair's lowering face. She laughed again shrilly. "Like to beat her now, wouldn't you, George?" she taunted. "Try it—maybe it'll do her good!"

She, too, went out; and that sharp, exasperating laugh came back from the hall.

Mrs. Gardner followed to speed her parting guests, and Peter Doane rubbed his chin meditatively. There was pity in

the thoughtful glance he gave to Elinor Rolland. "Poor kid!" he thought. "Poor, reckless, thoughtless young one! She didn't mean anything; but she's made two bitter enemies to-night. Mrs. Boudreau will never forgive her—never. And as for that Fox woman—— But she hated the little one before, I fancy."

Elinor Rolland, looking smaller than ever, advanced timidly toward young Sinclair. Her big eyes looked up at him appealingly; her lips trembled visibly, as she whispered:

"Are—are you mad at me, Georgie?"

Sinclair shrugged. "Oh, no; not at all!" he replied, and turned away.

"Two enemies, did I say?" Peter Doane muttered to himself. "Three, I imagine!"

Sinclair went to meet the returning hostess. Mrs. Gardner wore a troubled frown.

"Mrs. Boudreau has gone already," she told her husband. "I'm afraid she was awfully upset. Theo, too. I—I wish——"

"I must be going, too," Sinclair cut in. "I'm awfully sorry, Mrs. Gardner. I did my best to prevent all this. But——" He shrugged, with a bitter glance at Miss Rolland.

That young lady bit a trembling lip. Her small face was all awry, like that of a baby on the verge of loud wails. "I—I'm sorry, too," she faltered. "I'm afraid I s-spoiled your party, Mrs. Gardner. And I only meant to amuse everybody!"

Tone and look held a childish bewilderment. Plainly the girl did not even yet understand just why her performance had resulted so disastrously. George Sinclair made a disgusted sound.

"Come!" he ordered brusquely. "You've entertained enough for one evening."

Elinor lifted her small head proudly. "Very well! Good night, dear Mrs. Gardner; good night, Mr. Gardner, Mr.

Doane!" She turned to Sinclair, her eyes hard. "I—I'm afraid to go home alone; it's so dark. If you'll just see me to my door. I'll not trouble you any more, George—ever!"

Sinclair bowed sulkily, but made no other reply. The two young people left the room, Mrs. Gardner fluttering after them, vaguely distressed. Peter Doane grinned whimsically at his host.

"Whe-e-ew!" whistled that gentleman. "Poor kid! She didn't mean a thing, either. But how Theo Fox hates her, Peter. If this were a few hundred years ago, she'd slip a knife into her, or poison her soup some evening."

Doane nodded thoughtfully. "Ye-es, the latter probably. But I'd be more afraid of the other one, if I were Miss Rolland. That widow—Mrs. Boudreau, wasn't it? She's almost ready for murder, by the look of her just now. The young one had her going; played on her belief in spirits. It came pretty close to sacrilege—blasphemy. At least that's what Mrs. Boudreau seemed to think."

"There they go!" Gardner sighed in relief as the front door closed. Then he leaped up, his red face struck white. "Wh-what was *that*?"

That was a dull thud, as of a muffled blow. It came from without, from just beneath the living-room windows, which opened beside the front door. It was followed immediately by a shocked outcry, a confused scuffling of feet.

Some one began to pound on the door. "Help! Help! Open the door—get a light!"

It was George Sinclair's voice—hoarse, excited, almost unrecognizable, shaking with sudden horror. Gardner swore aloud; his wife, who had just re-entered the room, wrung her hands and began to cry nervously. Peter Doane rose deliberately, his broad, smooth-shaven face calm. He did not appear to hurry; yet he reached the hall before either of the others.

Sinclair was still pounding on the

front door, shouting incoherently. Doane snatched it open.

"Now, then—what's wrong? What—what—"

He stopped short with a queer grunt, as though from a body blow. "Huh! Who did this? Here, Gardner, help me lift her."

The tiny figure of Elinor Rolland lay in a pathetic heap on the stone steps. One slim arm was outthrown, as though in defense; her upturned face gleamed white and still in the dim light. She did not move.

Kneeling beside her, Doane cast a hard, questioning glance at her escort. Sinclair began to talk nervously, jerkily.

"I—I don't know what did happen. It was all so—I couldn't see. It was dark as a pocket; we'd just come from the light. I heard a sort of thump, and she just dropped down. And I began to yell for help. Is she—is she—dead?"

His voice dropped to a horrified whisper. Peter Doane touched limp wrist and quiet breast, searching for pulse-beats.

"I guess she is." His quiet voice sounded oddly grim and stern. "Help me lift her, Gardner; get her into the light."

Gardner obeyed, thrusting aside young Sinclair, who seemed mazed and bewildered. The young man kept muttering, repeating his incoherent story over and over. "It was so dark; I couldn't see anything. Just a kind of a thump, and she dropped right down."

The two older men carried the girl in and laid her on a couch. She was dead beyond a doubt. Her face was still and peaceful; it even wore a faint smile. There was no mark or bruise on her.

"Get a doctor, quick!" ordered Doane. His big hands moved deftly over the girl's head, touching here and there. Then he grunted again. "And the police!" he added over a shoulder. "Her skull's fractured back here."

He turned the limp form on the couch. Beneath that great coil of dark hair, at the nape of her neck, the skull was crushed to a pulplike softness.

"No mark," muttered Doane absently. "Hair padded the blow. Must have been hit with something mighty solid!"

He covered the still face with his handkerchief and went out into the hall. Gardner was at the telephone; his wife knelt beside the dead girl. But young Sinclair followed Doane, still babbling his jerky tale over and over: "It was dark as a pocket; I couldn't see a thing——" The story scarcely varied by so much as a word; it gave a curious effect, as of something learned by rote and repeated mechanically without understanding.

Peter Doane ignored the boy. He opened the big front door and peered out. It was a dark night, true enough; yet not so dark, he thought, that one need be quite blinded.

He knelt on the steps, peering, fumbling about, until his hand closed on a heavy, cold, oblong object. He lifted it with a satisfied grunt and carried it in to the light. It was a brick—an ordinary, rough-clay brick. At sight of it Mrs. Gardner exclaimed:

"Dear me! Did she fall over that, do you think? There were some boys playing around, just before dark; they left that brick on our steps. I told Henry to move it before somebody tripped over the thing."

Doane stared absently down at the thing, turning it over in his hands. "I don't think she fell over it," he answered slowly. "No-o-o. Hardly—I——" He stopped short, his vague stare focused sharply.

One corner of the brick was stained a darker red. Doane touched the stain gingerly, and it reddened his finger.

"There's blood on it!" he cried sharply. "Not hers, either; her skin wasn't broken. It's her murderer's blood! Sinclair, *let me see your hands!*"

The boy stared at him dumbly.

"Your hands—that one!" repeated Doane. "Quick!"

"I couldn't see a thing," muttered the other. "It was dark as a pocket, I tell you. And then I heard a kind of a thump, and——"

Impatiently Peter Doane stepped forward and gripped his wrist. He turned Sinclair's right-hand palm up. Along the inner side of the thumb was a jagged tear, from which fresh blood drops still oozed. "What's that?" demanded Doane.

"That?" he exclaimed dully, as though it did not matter. "Why, I must have scratched myself—on Elinor's hatpin. I reached down to feel of her face, you know. I couldn't see a thing; I just heard this sort of a thump——"

Doane dropped his hand—threw it aside, rather—with a disgusted "You killed Elinor Rolland!" he accused.

Sinclair merely stared. "It was dark as a pocket; I couldn't see a thing," he muttered.

The doorbell rang sharply. A stocky man in plain clothes entered, a uniformed policeman at his elbow. "Detective Sergeant Riggs," he announced. "What's all this about a killing, huh?"

The others glanced mutely at Peter Doane. He stepped forward. The detective nodded respectfully.

"How do, Mr. Doane. You in on this already?"

"Just happened to be here, Riggs," replied the other. And he gave the policeman a brief account of what had happened.

When he had finished, the officer nodded grimly and drew a pair of handcuffs from his hip pocket. "Coming quiet, are you?" he asked Sinclair.

The boy blinked at him dully. "I couldn't see a thing," he repeated. "And then I heard this sort of a thump——"

"Ah-h, cut it out! Needn't be trying to play innocent any more. We got the goods on you. Look there!" Riggs

pointed first at the crimson-stained brick, then at Sinclair's injured hand. "What more could a feller ask?"

He snapped the handcuffs on Sinclair's unresisting wrists and led him away. "Medical examiner'll be along presently," he informed Doane over his shoulder. "Going to stay?"

Doane nodded. "And, sergeant, this brick! Mind if I keep it overnight? I'll surely turn it in to headquarters tomorrow."

Riggs hesitated. "We-ell, seeing it's you, all right, Mr. Doane; but mind you bring it back. I'd be in trouble!"

Peter Doane nodded. As head of a nationally known private detective agency, his standing with the police was high. From another his request would have been refused at once. As the officers departed with their prisoner, he rubbed his chin thoughtfully, looking down at the brick he still held.

"Guess I won't wait for the examiner after all," he muttered. "You don't mind, Gardner. And, say, lend me a flash light."

Mr. Gardner nodded dubiously. "Just as you like, old man. I hate——" He stopped short, with an exclamation. "I forgot! We must phone right away to let the girl's people know. What, a flash light? Get it for him, will you, dear?"

Mrs. Gardner obeyed, and Doane went out, nodding absently to both, lamp in one hand and that sinister brick in the other.

Outside he paused, ruminating. Surely he had heard a scuffling of feet, the rustling of bushes, while Sinclair pounded on the door. He glanced over the edge of the low stoop and turned the beam of the flash light upon the ground.

Yes! The shrub at the left had been disturbed; its leaves were rumpled, a twig or two broken. In the soft earth beneath were confused marks, as though some one had stood there waiting. He dropped to his knees, search-

ing; but there were no clear footprints; the earth was merely disturbed and churned up.

Peter Doane rose slowly. Perhaps some one had stood there to await Miss Rolland's coming after all. That brick had been here, on the stoop; some one, gripping the chance-found weapon, had waited here, perhaps. Doane swung the brick experimentally. Yes, it was possible. A man of medium height, even a tall woman, might have stood here on the ground and struck Elinor Rolland, as she came down the steps. The girl was so small and short.

He rubbed his chin again meditatively. There was blood on the brick. The clumsy weapon had broken its wielder's skin. The murderer, therefore, must have a wounded hand. Was Sinclair innocent, after all? He had been much shaken. Peter Doane pondered. He visualized Mrs. Boudreau, pale, tense, threatening; heard again her final, ominous words.

A motor car was approaching, its engine roared louder and louder. Doane saw the long beam of its headlights sweep round a corner. He went down the steps and hurried away. That would be the medical examiner; he did not wish to be delayed just now.

Around the corner Doane paused in front of an all-night drug store. In its window was the blue shield of the telephone company. He rubbed his chin, then entered.

The phone booth was empty. He rifled the leaves of the directory, then called a number.

"Hello? Mrs. Boudreau? . . . No, don't bother; I just wanted to ask about her hand. Was it badly hurt?"

A subdued voice replied, evidently a servant's voice. "No, sir. It weren't bad at all, sir. Just a scratch. Who shall I say called?"

"What? Oh, never mind. I'll see her to-morrow."

Peter Doane hung up. He rubbed his

chin vigorously; his tired gray eyes were hard and grim. On impulse he called another number.

"Hello! Mr. Fox, please. . . . Hello! . . . Just wanted to ask about Miss Theo. Was her hand hurt badly?"

He listened to the reply, then hung up with a bang and swore ruefully. "The Fox woman, too!" he muttered. "This is like Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves, with every door on the street chalk-marked. Queer that *both* of them should have hurt their hands. I wonder now——"

Peter Doane went out, still gripping the forgotten brick. His brows drew together in a puzzled scowl. This little fishing expedition had been successful—too successful! He had too many suspects.

Down the street he strode, muttering. George Sinclair, Theo Fox, Mrs. Boudreau! Each had a motive; each had had opportunity; each had a wounded hand. Which one of the three was guilty? Whose blood had stained that brick?

He passed a red-brick house beside whose door was a modest brass plate: "Doctor Purcell." On to the corner he went, then stopped short and turned about. It would do no harm.

Back in front of the doctor's house he hesitated a moment. But there was a light in the window. He nodded, then rang the bell vigorously.

A short wait; then the door opened, and a slight, bald-headed man looked out, blinking behind huge horn-rimmed goggles.

"Well, what's wanted? I don't do general practice; better see Doctor Ames, down the street."

"It's Doane, doctor," replied the visitor. "Peter Doane. May I come in?"

"Surely, surely!" The physician threw the door wide and put out a slender hand, all stained with dyes and acids. "Come in, Peter! What brings you out so late?"

"Business," replied Doane, entering. "Glad to see you, doctor; you're looking fine. Say, you specialize in diseases of the blood and all that, don't you?"

The doctor nodded.

"Well, tell me: Can you determine by examination whose blood this is." He thrust out the stained brick.

Doctor Purcell blinked dubiously. "Why, I don't know. H'm!" He peered short-sightedly down at the brick. "Still quite fresh, I see; enough there to make a fairly complete examination, too. I can't say Peter. I can tell whether it's human blood; perhaps whether it came from a man or a woman. Further than that, it's doubtful—unless there happened to be an eosinophilia, or an anemia, or some other blood disease."

"Tell if it came from a man or a woman—how?"

The doctor blinked. His voice warmed, became enthusiastic. "Not infallibly, of course, but with normal blood— You see, in the female, one finds fewer red blood cells; four million, five hundred thousand, say, where there'd be five million in a man, to each cubic centimeter. And there are other points——"

Doane interrupted. "I'd like to stop, but I can't. Will you make an examination of that stain, just as complete as you can? I'll come back to-morrow. Tell me if it came from a man or a woman, and whatever else you find out? It's important."

"H'm! Assault—or murder?" asked the physician shrewdly. "Of course I will. But don't expect me to do too much, Peter. I can't identify the specimen, unless you bring me the person from whom it came."

Doane started. "If I brought you three people," he asked, "could you say from which one this blood came?"

"We-ell, I couldn't promise. It's possible. Ye-es, I think so—very likely. If there's enough here on this brick, anyhow. You see, there's a hemolytic

——" He lost himself in a maze of polysyllables which went quite over the other's head. "And, of course," he finished, "if this sample should show any definite blood disease——"

"Go to it, doc!" begged Doane. "It means life or death to one of three people. You see, a girl was murdered with this brick to-night, and that's the murderer's blood on it!"

And he went home to bed, strangely excited. "It'll be that Boudreau woman," was his last waking thought. "She had murder in her eyes when she looked at the girl. Fool thing to make fun of *anybody's* beliefs, no matter how silly they may seem to you!"

Early next morning he was called to the telephone. Doctor Purcell's voice came over the wire, thin and high, shaking with excitement.

"Hello! That you, Doane? I worked all night. I think I've got it. I can identify your murderer! Can you get me a chance to examine these three suspects of yours? Just to get one drop of blood from each, that's all."

"Why, yes," agreed Peter. "I think so. Meet me at police headquarters in half an hour, can you? And bring that brick."

Sergeant Riggs received the murder weapon with palpable relief; then he took Doane and the doctor to Sinclair's cell at once.

The little physician glanced once at the haggard young man and shook his head. "Not the one," he pronounced. "However——"

He caught Sinclair's hand, pricked a finger with a tiny lancet, and caught the drop of blood deftly upon a glass slide. The boy stared at him, dumb and unresisting.

"Does no harm to be certain," said Purcell. "Next?"

They drove to Theo Fox's home to find that young woman with her right hand bandaged. "I caught it in the door last night," she explained. "Pinched it

awfully." She exploded into that shrill, mirthless laugh.

Peter Doane explained their purposes. She stared at him angrily, but after some argument consented to the test.

Mrs. Boudreau next. Her hand also was bandaged; a pet dog had bitten her, it seemed. Here Doane had no trouble. He suggested the possibility of hydrophobia; and the widow consented eagerly to an examination of her blood. "That'll surely tell?" she quavered. "If it's negative, it means I shan't have hydrophobia?"

Doctor Purcell assured her such was the case, and they went away, promising to notify her at once.

"It won't show anything of the kind, of course," Purcell declared. "But rabies is almost unheard of in man, anyhow. Most cases are plain hysteria. I think, Peter, that she's your killer. She looks it; pale and jaundiced a bit and shaky."

"Let's find out at once," urged Doane; and they drove straight to the doctor's laboratory.

There, after an hour's silent, intense work, Purcell raised his goggled eyes, bewildered.

"Sure it was one of those three, Peter?"

"Why, ye-es. Not absolutely, of course. But each had the chance to use that brick; and each one has an injured hand. And there was blood on the brick."

The physician shook his head. "You're wrong," he declared positively. "It was none of them!"

"How do you know?" insisted Peter.

"Because the murderer had malaria! This sample from the brick is full of the *plasmodium*. What's more, he—or she—must be having an attack to-day; chills and fever, you know. The bugs were almost ready to sporulate last night; did sporulate this morning, no doubt, and cause an attack."

"Malaria!" shouted Peter. "Sure?"

The doctor favored him with a scornful glance. "Of course!"

"Where's your phone? Get me police headquarters quick! Hello! . . . Hello! Sergeant Riggs, at once! Hello! . . . Riggs? Peter Doane speaking. Get young Sinclair to the phone at once! . . . What? . . . Hang the regulations; do it! . . . Hello? Sinclair! . . . Tell me, did Miss Rolland do these séances often? . . . She did? . . . Anybody get mad before? . . . Huh! . . . All right."

He hung up and turned to the puzzled doctor. "She faked a spiritualistic séance," he explained; "this girl who was killed. Good at it, she was. Did the same thing six months ago; Sigerson was there—the botanist. Left for South America soon after. He was terribly angry, Sinclair says; said it was blasphemous, and I don't know what."

"Well?"

"Well! Sigerson was there last night, I tell you. When somebody suggested this medium stuff, he went right off; and I heard him mutter something about sacrilege, too. Half crazy, like all these explorer chaps. Let's go!"

He dragged the doctor out to a taxicab and gave an address. In fifteen minutes they were entering the quiet hotel at which Rudolph Sigerson lived. "Mr. Sigerson is sick," the hallboy said.

"Got to see him anyhow!" Doane insisted. The boy took them upstairs.

They entered a bedroom to find Sigerson, gaunt, stooped and yellow, huddled in a chair, blanket-wrapped, shivering visibly. He scowled at them.

"Get out! I'm sick!" he growled and put up a hand, as though to push them away.

Doane exclaimed sharply; for that hand was bandaged!

"Sigerson," he snapped, "why did you kill Elinor Rolland?"

The man gaped. Between loose lips, his teeth clicked like castanets, with excitement and ague.

"H-how did you know?" he gasped.

Peter Doane shrugged. "You barked your hand on that brick," said he. "Doctor Purcell, here, found malaria bugs in the blood."

The botanist drew his blankets closer. His trembling shook the chair. "Y-yes!" he chattered. "I d-did k-ill her! Why not? She—she blasphemed! She mocked the spirits; and they punished her. I was only their instrument. Time and again," he went on, after a pause,

"time and again, there in the jungle, along the Amazon, spirits from the other side came and whispered, whispered to me. They said to give her one more chance when I got back. And then, if she still blasphemed, to strike! It was only justice—what I did."

Peter Doane shrugged. "Where's your phone? Have to call the police to take charge of you. Say, Purcell, malaria's a dangerous disease for a murderer to have, isn't it?"

IN NEXT WEEK'S ISSUE:

Opening Installment of

The Avenging Twins Try It Again

The second escapade of The Avenging Twins keeps them guessing which is the accessory to the "crime."

By JOHNSTON McCULLEY



The House of Evil Vapors

"Thoughts are things"—when the evil vapors from an overwrought mind materialize, tragedy ensues.

By ERNEST M. POATE



Dropped From Heaven

A date with a crook admirer might get any girl into trouble, but when that girl wishes to avoid publicity, a diamond necklace in her pocket, and a search for the thief, make things interesting.

By FREDERICK AMES COATES

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Now, readers, help those whose friends or relatives are missing, as you would like to be helped if you were in a similar position.

WARNING.—Do not forward money to any one who sends you a letter or telegram, asking for money "to get home," etc., unless you are absolutely certain that the author of such telegram or letter is the person you are seeking.

CHARLES.—Of course you know we shall always love you just the same. We have no key to the auto-ped house. We both hope you are well and happy. Father and Mother.

BRANDT, FRANK.—He was placed in a child-saving institution in Omaha, Nebraska, which later was burned and all records destroyed, so that it has been impossible to find any trace of him. He would be now thirty years old, had light-brown hair and blue eyes, and a scar on his face below the cheek bone. He was adopted from the home by people whose name is not known. Any one who can give information that would help to find him will do a great favor by writing to his brother, Henry F. Brandt, Route 3, El Reno, Oklahoma.

FITZSIMMONS, ED.—Come home. Your father and mother are not angry with you.

WEEKS, ARCHIE E.—He disappeared from Baltimore, Maryland, on May 10, 1919. He is about five feet five inches in height, twenty-five years old, and of light complexion. There is a tattooed emblem on one arm, meaning death before dishonor. His mother is longing to hear from him, and has valuable information for him. She hopes that he, or some one who knows him, will see this and write to her. Everything is O. K. at home. L. M., care of this magazine.

CADIEUX.—The parents of ARTHUR CADIEUX are asked to communicate with L. G. W., in care of this magazine, if they ever cared for their boy. Important.

WYANT, J. R., and BERT.—Bert is forty-three years old, about five feet seven inches tall, with dark hair, and was last heard of in Ashland, Oregon. J. R. is twenty years old, with light hair and blue eyes. They are both electricians, and it is thought that they may be working in a lumber camp in Oregon. Information as to their whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by Bobbie Suchon, 536 Hobart Street, Oakland, California.

SMITH.—My grandfather, Martin L. Smith, died about 1840. After his death my grandmother, whose maiden name was "Finley," moved with her three children from Knoxville to middle Tennessee. After the Civil War my father, Martin van Buren Smith, heard that his grandfather was still living and went to visit him. His name was either William Alexander, or Belden Smith, and his wife was a St. John. My grandfather had a brother, Robert Smith, and a sister who married a man named Hopper or Hoffman. I would like to find out where my grandfather and great-grandfather died, and shall be glad to hear from any one who can give me information on this subject, or from any relatives. Durham, care of this magazine.

PAULIE.—Please write and let us know where you are. If you come go to daddy or Earl at the mill. If you write to Sky Sky, will get it. Please let us hear from you. Mamma, E. J. W.

HAMILTON, NESTOR.—He went to Buffalo, New York, about ten years ago. An old friend would like to hear from him. Nestor Wirta, 337 East Spring Street, Titusville, Pennsylvania.

CHOPPINGS, ROSIE.—I was adopted when I was six years old, and my name was changed from Rosie Choppings to Marie Lambert. Information that would help me to find some of my relatives would be gratefully appreciated. Mrs. E. Davis, care of this magazine.

HUGHES, MRS. C. H.—She was last heard from in Hot Springs, Arkansas. Any one who can give information about her will do a great favor by writing to Mrs. I. Raymond, care of this magazine.

HEYNST, BERNARD.—About thirty years ago he left the Netherlands for the United States. He was a corn merchant and did business for his uncle in the markets of Germany and the Netherlands. An old friend who has not heard from him for years would be very happy to get news of him and hopes he will see this notice, or be told of it, and write to her. Mrs. T. Putnam, care of this magazine.

OTTOMAN, ORIL.—He was last heard of in a hospital in Seattle in 1917. He is about forty years of age, of slight build, fair complexion, and about five feet eight inches tall. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by writing to his foster parent, Hugh Stewart, Dural, Saskatchewan, Canada.

MANOSH, CARL, of Montreal, Canada, who served on the U. S. S. "North Carolina" from 1917 to 1919, is asked to write to a shipmate, who will greatly appreciate any news of his whereabouts. Walter F. Meinhardt, 316 Fifth Avenue, Altoona, Pennsylvania.

LEACH, LLOYD.—He served in Company E, 50th Infantry, A. O., in Germany. He is asked to write to his old friend, H. V. Munyon, 739 West Seventeenth Street, Des Moines, Iowa.

SCHWEBKE, FRED.—When last heard from he was unloading coal at Camp Grant, Illinois. He is asked to write to a friend who has not heard from him for two years. Mattie Symons, General Delivery, San Jose, California.

MILLS, SHERMAN C.—He left home four or five years ago and went to Winnemucca, Nevada, where he worked on a ranch. He was last heard of about a year ago in West Haven, Connecticut. He has a thin face, black hair and blue eyes, and is about five feet seven inches tall. He is asked to come home, as everything is O. K. now, or write to his mother. Any information as to his whereabouts will be most gratefully received by his brother, Ben Mills, 1314 West Ninth Street, Coffeyville, Kansas.

LA SELLE, TERRELL.—He has been missing about fourteen years. He was in Portland, Oregon, and went from there to Alaska. His daughter wishes to hear from him and will greatly appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. Fern Dingate, 239 East Broad Street, Elyria, Ohio.

MEYERS, ALBERT.—He is about twenty-three years of age, five feet four inches in height, has only one arm, the right one having been amputated at the elbow, and there are three fingers missing on the other hand. In 1920-21, it is thought that he was employed in Philadelphia as a bookkeeper or timekeeper. He often spent the summer months along the North Jersey coast. A former pal who is now in a position to help him, would be glad to find him, and will greatly appreciate any helpful information. Y. A. H., care of this magazine.

WILKERSON, HUBERT, who was last heard from in Ralston, Oklahoma. Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a favor by writing to his brother, Herman Wilkerson, Hope, Kansas.

PURVIS, HERMAN.—His last letter home was from Minneapolis, Minnesota, over a year ago, when he said he was going farther west with an old gentleman who was going through the country with an automobile. His parents are heartbroken at not having heard from him, and will be grateful for any information about him. They hope he will see this and write at once. Mrs. Myra Purvis, Brewton, Alabama.

WELLS.—My mother, whose maiden name was Myrtle Wells, died about 1899 in Chicago. Her husband's name was Martin Tobin, and he was sometimes called Ed Murphy. She also had a sister, Mrs. Willoughby, who had a daughter, Lulu, who lived in Valparaiso, Indiana, and a brother who lived somewhere in the East. I would be pleased to hear from any of my mother's people, or from any one who could tell me about them. Mrs. R. L. McGill, 2701 Portland Avenue, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

YOUNG, CHARLEY, ETHEL, AUDREY, MARION, and GRACE, who were last heard from in Winona, Oklahoma, in June, 1919, are asked to write to their uncle, Sam Shields, Route 1, Choctaw, Oklahoma.

LEITCH, SARAH JANE.—She left Belfast, Ireland, for Australia, about thirty-five years ago, and two years later is supposed to have married a building contractor in Iceland. She has not been heard of since. She would be now about sixty years of age. Any information concerning her will be appreciated by W. H. L., care of this magazine.

MYERS, EARL L.—He was a member of Company K, 2d Infantry, and was last heard of at Camp Dodge. Also, any other members of Company K who were at Camp Dodge, Iowa, during August and September, 1918, are asked to write to F. Miller, 314 Nicollet Avenue, Mankato, Minnesota.

PRINCE.—The folks at 49 would like to hear from you. Mother.

JOHNNY.—Write to me at once and send your address, as there is something important you must know. Louisa.

N. MEX.—Please write to your wife at 4936 North Western Avenue. She is very anxious to hear from you. Everything O. K., Ellen.

LATHAM, FLORENCE WAGNER, formerly of Omaha, Nebraska, and Council Bluffs, Iowa. She is the daughter of John L. Wagner and has relatives in Clyde, Kansas. She is asked to write to Lawrence, who has been seeking her for two years, in care of this magazine.

SCHLOTTER, MRS. WILLIAM, who was Rebecca Wolfe before her marriage. She is a widow with three children, and was last heard from in 1918 in St. Joseph, Missouri. Information as to her whereabouts will be gratefully received, as it is very important that she be found. Mrs. Louis Gavette, Route 2, Frankfort, South Dakota.

HARKINS, T. R., sometimes called "Little Tom," and last heard from in Naco, Arizona, twenty-three years ago. He is asked to write to his sister, who would be pleased to hear from any one who knows his whereabouts. Mrs. Elizabeth Langdon, 1020 Roy Street, Houston, Texas.

HOLDEN.—I would like very much to find my parents, Henry and Marie Holden, who were last heard of in Grove, Oklahoma. Any information that will help me to communicate with them will be gratefully appreciated. F. E. Holden, care of this magazine.

LISTER, WILLIAM.—He was last heard from in Newton, Iowa, seventeen years ago, and was the adopted son of James and Ann Lister. He is now around fifty years old. Any information concerning him or his wife will be gratefully received. M. H., care of this magazine.

VREELAND, GEORGE and DAVID (TRAVIS).—They are now about thirty-five years old. They were born at Teaneck, New Jersey, and lived with their grandfather until about twenty years ago, when he allowed them to be adopted by some man whose name is not known. Their sister would be very happy to hear from them, or to get any news of them, and will appreciate any information that will help her to communicate with them. Mrs. C. W. Wilcox, Jr., Peekskill, New York.

BLEDSOE, MRS. LAURA, who used to live at Kennett, Missouri, is asked to write to an old friend, who would like very much to hear from her. Also **JESSE H. SWIFT**, who was with the 96th Aero Squadron at El Paso, Texas, is asked to write. J. H. B., Box 421, Sand Springs, Oklahoma.

COLEMAN, WALTER E.—He is a locomotive engineer, and is now about fifty years of age. There is important news for him and he is asked to write to G. F. Schulze, Harahan, Louisiana.

ARNOLD, BLANCHE LORENA.—She is about seventeen years old, with light hair and blue eyes, and was last heard from in 1914. She was taken from a lady named Harriet Burton, and placed in some kind of a school in Columbus, Ohio. An old friend would like to hear from her, or from any one who knows where she is, and any information that will help to find her will be most gratefully received. Miss Della Springer, P. O. Box 64, Welshfield, Ohio.

FRIEND, FRANK L.—Please come back. My heart is breaking. I don't want to live without you. Your wife, Lillian.

McMAINS, MRS. VIOLA, who was last heard of at Sasakwa, Oklahoma. She is the daughter of J. B. Rowland, and has two children, a boy and a girl. Any information as to their whereabouts will be greatly appreciated, and it will be to her interest to write to her uncle, Frank McMains, care of this magazine.

HIGHT, ALBERT or LAMBERT.—He was last seen in July, 1903, and would be now about sixty-five years old. He was five feet five inches in height, with brown hair, partly gray sandy mustache, fair complexion, and blue eyes. His son is very anxious to find him and will gratefully appreciate any helpful information. William I. Hight, R. P. D. 3, Box 64, Massena, New York.

STEELE, VERNON C.—He was last heard of in Spokane, Washington, about four years ago. His sister will gratefully appreciate any information as to his whereabouts. Mrs. Elizabeth Waple, 666 Morton Place N. E., Washington, D. C.

KEPPLER, MRS. JACOB, whose maiden name was Ellise Nass, and who lived somewhere in New Jersey twenty years ago. Her husband was in the butcher business. An old friend would like to hear from her. Mrs. E. Peter, care of this magazine.

PALMER, ALBERT C.—He is forty years old, five feet six inches tall, with blue or gray eyes, gray hair, and is bald. It was heard that he had been in the army and was trained at Camp Funston. He left home in 1914 to get work and has not been heard of since. His father was drowned three years ago, and his mother needs him, so do his children. They all love him and want him to come home. He was last heard of in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Lelah Palmer Ward, Box 347, Curtis, Nebraska.

SPRINGER HEIRS.—The descendants of Charles Christopher Springer are asked to communicate with the Springer Heir, Inc., 715 Tacoma Building, Chicago, Illinois, to obtain information of value.

WILSON, VIOLA, who is believed to be in Michigan, is asked to send her address to Frank McKinney, care of this magazine.

BARNES, WILLIAM, who lived in Anne Arundel County, Maryland, about twenty-seven years ago. His wife, Laura, died about that time, leaving four children—Bessie, Emma, Millie, and Mary. News of their father, or of their mother's people would be most gratefully received by Mary Barnes, care of this magazine.

McCANN, THOMAS and JAMES, formerly of Collingwood, Ontario, and last heard from at Everett, Washington, twenty years ago. Their only sister would be happy to hear from either of them, and hopes they will see this and write to her at 445 Seymour Street, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

FREEMAN, MILDRED, formerly of Elk Street, Buffalo, New York, and last heard from at Pottstown, Pennsylvania, in 1915. An old friend is very anxious to find her, and will appreciate any helpful information. Avery G. Conright (Mooch), care of this magazine.

NOTICE.—Members of the Twelfth Street gang, Lincoln, Nebraska, who knew George W. Lane, otherwise "Linky," are asked to write to him. He was with this gang in the 80's. He would be very happy to hear from any of them. George W. Lane, care of this magazine.

LORING, JOHNSON, who lived at Yorktown, New York, and left home about three years ago. He was engaged in selling Ford cars, and is believed to have gone West. His aged father and mother are rapidly declining, and he can safely and in strictest confidence communicate with his old friend, H. D. Levino, of Peekskill, New York.

PALMER, HARRY L.—He was a railroader and was last heard from in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, about sixteen years ago. His left arm was cut off below the elbow. Also his wife, Mary, and their two daughters, Irene and Helen, who were last heard of in Cleveland, Ohio. A relative would be glad to hear from them, and will appreciate any information as to their present address. L. C. McClintock, 132 Brown Avenue, Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania.

ASHE, I. DALLAS.—When last heard from he was in Liverpool, England, in 1917. He is thirty-one years old. His mother is very anxious to get news of him, and hopes that he will see this notice, or be told of it, and write to her soon. She will be most grateful for any information that will help her to find her son. Mrs. Lucy H. Ashe, care of this magazine.

MALONE, ALVA.—He was last heard of in Sherman, Texas, when he wrote saying he was going to New Mexico. He has blue eyes and fair complexion. He is asked to write to his old chum, H. W., care of this magazine.

KNIFE.—The wife of Henry Knife, who before her marriage was Ellen Brick, died in Austin, Minnesota, in January, 1898, after the birth of twin daughters, one of whom died also and was buried with the mother, at Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin, where her relatives lived. The father died a short time after, leaving four children. Any news of the children, or of other relatives, will be gratefully appreciated. They may be known as McKnife. G. M., care of this magazine.

JACOBUS, ARTHUR B.—He is a native of Newark, New Jersey, and was last heard from in California, where he wrote at one time for a man named Buck. He is asked to write to his brother, C. Jacobus, in care of this magazine.

BERWICK.—My father, Edward Ruscombe Berwick, was born in England, where he married and settled in Bristol. He had five sons and one daughter, Jennie. One boy was named Ruscombe, and another Harry. Their mother died when they were small and the father came to America, where he married, in 1888, Miss Emily Knox, of Dumas, Missouri. There are three children of this marriage, of which I am the eldest, and was named after two of my father's sisters, Emma and Delilah. I would very much like to find my half brothers and sister. Our relatives in England do not know where they are, and I hope that this notice will be seen by them, or by some one who knows them, and that I shall soon have the pleasure of hearing from them. My father is alive and would be very happy to get news of his other children. Mrs. Lila Durham, Ott, Arkansas.

McLANE, or PLANK, FLORENCE, who was last heard of in Denver, Colorado. An old friend would like to hear from her, or from any one who can give information as to her whereabouts. Mrs. Kathryn Latta, 210 South Main Street, Bloomington, Illinois.

GREENE, JOSEPH or CHARLIE, who lived at one time in Richmond, Indiana, and was last heard of in Texas about eight years ago. Is about fifty-five years of age. Information as to his whereabouts will be appreciated. Box 227, Montezuma, Indiana.

DEXTER, ERNEST E.—He is a native of New Hampshire, is forty-six years old, and was last heard from at Chicago three years ago. His brother is anxious to hear from him and will greatly appreciate any helpful information. Herman Dexter, 410 Salem Street, Medford, Massachusetts.

DUTCH.—Please write and let me know where you are. Same address, 718, in care of dad. Lally.

MILLER, FRANK.—He is asked to write to his friend Ernest, who is greatly worried at not hearing from him. 641 O'Farrell Street, San Francisco, California.

STARR, MRS. F. B.—She was last heard of in San Francisco. Her husband works at the Mare Island shipyards. Information as to her whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by her brother, Frank Riley, care of this magazine.

COLLINS, MARJORY, GLADYS, LAURA, SAMUEL, and **MRS. EMMA,** formerly of Spokane, Washington, and last heard from in Oakland, California. Also **MISS EFFIE WHITE,** of Shelbyville, Kentucky. A friend would be glad to hear from them, and will appreciate any information as to their present address. H. F. G., care of this magazine.

HALPIN, DAVID, who left Ottawa, Canada, over thirty years ago, and was last heard of in 1898, when he was working in quarries in Lamont, near Chicago. He is a native of Limerick, Ireland. Any information about him will be thankfully received by his brother, William Halpin, Glen Williams, Ontario, Canada.

NOTICE.—Any one who served in Troop E, 1st Cavalry, Camp Harry J. Jones, from July, 1920, to July, 1921, please write to C. J. Cooke, 213 West Duke Street, Raleigh, North Carolina.

GOODMAN, LESTER.—He left Niagara, Wisconsin, in the spring of 1918, and when last heard of was working in a paper mill in Oregon. He is about twenty-four years old, of medium build, and light complexion. Any one who knows his whereabouts will confer a great favor by writing to his brother-in-law, Harry Wachter, Box 86-A, R. R. 1, Kalamazoo, Michigan.

IRWIN, GOLDIE.—She is about twenty-two years of age and was born in Newark, Ohio, where she was last heard from. Her mother's maiden name was Annie Glenn. Her father will be greatly appreciate any information as to her address. Frank F. Irwin, 1519 Newton Street, Jackson, Michigan.

ETHERIDGE, G. F.—He is about sixty-two years of age, five feet eight inches tall, bald, with sandy mustache and dark-blue eyes. Any one who can give information as to his whereabouts will do a great favor by writing to J. S., care of this magazine.

ORNSTEIN, CROW, formerly of Montreal, and **TOMMY ESMOND,** are asked to write at once to their pal without fail. This is important. Bull Russell, Box 251, Station B, Montreal, Canada.

COBURN, PHYLLIS, of Toledo, Ohio, in 1918. She is believed to have married and may be in California. Any one who can give information that will lead to communication with her will do a favor that will be gratefully appreciated by writing to Don C., care of this magazine.

BIVINS, JOHN.—He left Alamance County, North Carolina, just after the Civil War, with his mother and stepfather, Tom Crabtree, when he was twelve years old. He would be about seventy now. He was last heard of in Texas. Any information about him would be gratefully received by his brother, Charles F. Bivins, 109 Everett Street, Burlington, North Carolina.

DAVENPORT, CHARLES E.—He left Youngstown, Ohio, about eight years ago. He is very dark, with black eyes and hair, and is five feet seven inches tall. His aunt is anxious to find him and will greatly appreciate any helpful information. Mrs. Deborah Many, care of this magazine.

F. G. B.—Your wife is very anxious and worried about you and cannot understand why you have failed to write to her as you promised. Please let her hear from you at once. Mrs. F. G. B.

SMITH, ARTHUR and DOUGLAS, who left Toronto, Canada, about twenty-one years ago. Their brother would be very happy to hear from them. John Alexander Smith, Box 582, Minot, North Dakota.

SANTMYER, ROY R.—Please come home, or write to your mother, who is very anxious about you and would like to hear from you without delay. Mrs. Mary Santmyer, 229 Shaffer Avenue, Washington, Pennsylvania.

STRAFFIN, FRED D., and his wife, whose maiden name was Ethel Ford. When Mr. Straffin was last heard of he was in St. Maries, Idaho, and his wife, who was in California in 1904, has not been heard of for five years. Their daughter would greatly appreciate any information that would help her to communicate with her parents. Ethel G. Straffin, 1010 North Pennsylvania Street, Indianapolis, Indiana.

KAMPE, WILLIAM F., PHILIP G., and their sisters, **AMELIA GREEN** and **KATE MILLERSHIPE.** They were all living in Brooklyn, New York, about thirty years ago. Their brother George was put in the New York Juvenile Asylum in 1892, was sent West from there, and that is the last he has heard of his sisters and brothers. His brothers and the husband of Mrs. Amelia Green are all railroad men. Any news of them would be gladly received by Mr. and Mrs. George P. Kampe, care of this magazine.

LIEB, LOUIS.—He has been missing since December 7, 1914. He was twenty-one years of age, weighed about one hundred and sixty pounds, was five feet seven inches tall, and had a scar on the lower lip. Any one who can give information as to what has become of him, or who can help his distressed parents to find him, will do a great kindness by writing to M. Lieb, 53 Auburn Street, Boston, Massachusetts.

SIMON, JOHN X.—Have been searching for you everywhere and am awfully worried. Everything is O. K. Please write to me in care of this magazine. John Hamilton.

ATTENTION.—I would like to hear from any of the men who served in the 115th Company in Santo Domingo, between July 5, 1920, and September 30, 1921. William Kyle, 355 Beatrice Avenue, Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

LUNDERBURG, KNUT.—He was last heard of near El Paso or Fort Bayard, New Mexico. Any news of him will be gratefully appreciated by an army pal, L. D. Nevill, R. D. Box 31-B, San Antonio, Texas.

FINES, WALTER and WILLIAM.—Walter is thirteen years old and was last heard from four years ago when he was in the children's home at Oklahoma City. He was adopted from there, and it is not known by whom. William is eleven years old and was in the hospital for cripples at Kansas City. Any one who knows where these boys are will earn the gratitude of their sister by writing to her. Mrs. Alice White, Bartlesville, Oklahoma, R. F. D. Box 168.

LYNCH, JOHN PATRICK.—He was last heard from in Deer Lodge, Montana, in 1899. He is now sixty-nine years of age. His sister Kate would be very happy to hear from him and will gratefully appreciate any information that will help her to know where he is. Mrs. Kate Burke, 911 South Main Street, Butte, Montana.

GISH, OPAL, who was last heard of in Baltimore, Maryland. Please come home. Your mother is very ill.—Hans Gish.

LANE, LEROY.—He left my farm on May 4, 1921, for the oil fields of Wyoming. I have information that I believe would be of interest to him and shall be glad to hear from any one who knows his address. A. R. Coleman, R. F. D. 1, Hubbard, Oregon.

KELLEY, W. F.—He served on the U. S. S. "Arkansas" in 1919-21 as a radio man. It is thought that he may have gone to his grandmother's home in Texas. Her name is Harris. Several of his old friends want his address and any information that will help to find him will be greatly appreciated by Jack Adams, Box B, Myrtle Point, Oregon.

CROUCH, J. H., who was my buddy on the U. S. S. "Albatross," **L. PINKERTON,** who was with me in Newport, Rhode Island, and **R. E. REXER,** who was last seen in Camp Perry, Norfolk, Virginia, are asked to write to their old friend and shipmate, H. Rader, 707 East Carter Street, Marion, Illinois.

KNUCKEY, THERESA.—She was last heard of at Pawnee or Edinburgh, Illinois. Any one who knows her present address please send it to E. W. P., care of this magazine.

KENT, WILLIAM.—His eldest daughter is very anxious to hear from him, and will appreciate any information as to his present address. Mrs. F. W., care of this magazine.

ATCHISON, CHARLES T.—He has been gone from home for eight years, and was last heard from in Canada six years ago. It is thought that he may have enlisted in the army or navy in Canada. Any word of him will be most gratefully received by his parents, who will appreciate any information that will give them the slightest clew as to what has become of him. Please write to his father, Harry P. Atchison, 629 Gallagher Street, Springfield, Ohio.

SLEBBINS, MRS. DOLLY.—She was last heard from in December, 1921, when she was living on Sutter Street, San Francisco. She is asked to write to Dad, who has something to hear from her. In care of this magazine.

DAVIS, EDWARD R.—He was discharged from the army at the Presidio, California, on October 12, 1905. Later he married Henrietta Bruchweller, and worked at railroad, cannery, and other odd jobs. He is about five feet ten inches tall, with light-brown hair, slightly bald and gray at the temples, and is forty-three years old. Information as to his whereabouts will be greatly appreciated by Mrs. Henrietta L. Davis, 409 East Sixteenth Street, Minneapolis, Minnesota.

MOLDE, MINA.—She was last heard from at Salt Lake City and Denver. She is about thirty-five years old, five feet six inches tall, and is dark. Her sister Ida is dead. Any one who knows her present address will do a favor by sending it to P. A. Erickson, Ray, Minnesota.

EARLEY, W. W.—Any one who knows his whereabouts will do a great favor by writing to his brother, E. N. Earley, Goodman, Missouri.

BISBY, V. R.—He is about forty-five years old and was last heard of in Newton, Kansas, about two years ago. His mother is in very poor health, and is anxious to communicate with her son. Mrs. I. G. Ingalla, R. F. D. 5, Box 64-B, Independence, Missouri.

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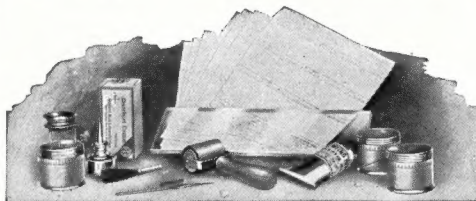
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